Sir Lenny Henry, Leah Cowan, David Olusoga, Marverine Duffy, Charlene White, Kimberly McIntosh, Professor Stuart Hall, Kesewa Hennessy, Will Norman, Emma Butt, Dr David Dunkley Gyimah, Dr Erica Gillingham, Dr Peter Block, Suchandrika Chakrabarti
Welcome to Reprezentology, a journal dedicated to research and best-practice perspectives on how to make the media more representative of all sections of society.

A starting point for effective representation are the “protected characteristics” defined by the Equality Act 2010 including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, as well as their intersections. We recognise that definitions of diversity and representation are dynamic and constantly evolving and our content will aim to reflect this.

Reprezentology is a forum where academic researchers and media industry professionals can come together to pool expertise and experience. We seek to create a better understanding of the current barriers to media participation as well as examine and promote the most effective ways to overcome such barriers. We hope the journal will influence policy and practice in the media industry through a rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Our belief is that a more representative media workforce will enrich and improve media output, enabling media organisations to better serve their audiences, and encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse. This is vital for a healthy society and well-functioning democracy. We look forward to working with everyone who shares this vision.

REPREZENTOLOGY
The Journal of Media and Diversity

Editorial Mission Statement

In the wake of Black Lives Matter, many people at the helm of the UK media industry have rightly been critical of its historic failings around diversity – both in its output and in making sure its workforce mirrors the many shades of modern multicultural Britain. But we must remember that this period of self-analysis does not mark a moment – it heralds a movement. In the pages of Reprezentology – the Journal for Media and Diversity – we hope to build connections between the academy, journalists and broadcasters. Rather than seek piecemeal reform to address the underrepresentation of marginalised voices, we wish to go further and help create a media that reflects the richness of every part of society. Launched as a joint initiative between Birmingham City University and Cardiff University (see back page for comments by their Vice-Chancellors), we want to analyse and work with all areas of media production, commissioning new research and opening meaningful conversations on how to dismantle existing barriers to participation.

This first issue features Sir Lenny Henry and David Olusoga talking frankly about race and stereotyping in the television industry, Charlene White’s thoughts on fusing together current affairs and children’s programming for ‘IRL with Team Charlene’, and Dr Peter Block and Emma Butt unveiling their original academic research on the systemic lack of diversity in broadcast regulation and post-production sound recording. We republish Professor Stuart Hall’s ferocious television essay ‘It Ain’t Half Racist, Mum’, discover a treasure trove in the Black radio archive, consider cultural depictions of disability and newspaper initiatives to better engage women readers, and navigate the evolving worlds of freelance and political journalism. At the end of each article, you will find a summary of ideas for the industry to act upon.

We are looking to widen the editorial board of Reprezentology (see back page for full list) as well as our pool of writers. If you are interested in contributing to this developing project or have feedback and suggestions for future issues, please get in touch: Reprezentology@bcu.ac.uk

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LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Sir Lenny Henry in conversation with historian, broadcaster and film-maker David Olusoga on media diversity, institutional memory and racism in the UK television industry.

Sir Lenny Henry: My colleagues and I set up the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity at Birmingham City University because we had this feeling that the industry often doesn't learn from its mistakes or build on its successes. Why do you think history is so important in achieving media diversity?

David Olusoga: The thing history can bring to the debate about diversity and inclusion is an understanding of where race came from. These ideas are so deep, so ingrained within our society, that when we just talk about structural racism and we don't talk about the historical process of construction, I don't think we land that idea properly. These ideas did not come about of their own volition. This was not accidental. The idea of Black inferiority, Black intellectual inferiority, cognitive inferiority, behavioural inferiority – these things were invented.
David Olusoga: People were comfortable with Black people driving the buses but they didn’t want them as neighbours and they didn’t want them going out with their daughter. They never thought about the possibility of saying, you know, he’s running the bus company.

Sir Lenny Henry: The way to change it is to increase who’s running things. It’s what we’ve been saying for years.

David Olusoga: I’ve noticed throughout my career when I’ve been in positions of authority that some people have really struggled to actually do what I say and to see that my judgement is valuable. I had an experience with an assistant producer. I devised a sequence and I’d spoken to a lot of historians and I thought it would work, and I’d asked the assistant producer to go and look into it and find the people and see if we could get access to the locations. And she had gone to my business partner and said, ‘David wants you to do this, and I don’t think it’s right or appropriate’. And my business partner said, ‘Well he’s written books on slavery and I haven’t, and he’s been a producer for 20 years, what’s the problem?’ If that had been the other arena in order to make a chance she’d have come to me and said my business partner has this crafty idea and it’s not going to work. And, you know, we made the sequence and it made perfect sense. And it made perfect sense because I’d been making TV programmes since my late 20s. I’m really good at it. I hadn’t had that experience writing for newspapers or working for publishers. It’s only in television where I feel my confidence chipped away at. There’s something specifically wrong with television and I think it’s worse than other industries. It’s more insidious, it’s more dangerous and it’s egalitarian and racist.

And I think we need to realise that this game plan has been worked before and it is not a perfect application and it’s being applied and we need to watch for the signs of it being applied. Also we need to imagine if it hadn’t been applied. Imagine if America had listened to calls for Black equality in 1919 and they’d had civil rights in the 1920s, not the 1960s. America would be 40 years ahead of where it is now. It’s a tragedy that appeals for civil rights were tarred with being Bolshevik. It’s a tragedy for everybody.

The game plan

Sir Lenny Henry: What lessons in more recent history can we draw upon to understand the situation we’re in now?

David Olusoga: We need to remember that every Black movement for equality has been demonised. The example I’m fond of is that what’s happening to Black Lives Matter is exactly what happened to the African American veterans of the First World War who came back to America in 1919 having fought in the French army. They weren’t allowed to fight in the American army because white officers wouldn’t lead them into battle. They came back with medals on their chest having fought in what was called the Great War for civilisation and they began to make demands for equality. They made civil rights demands and their movement was tarred with being Bolshevik. Rather than civil rights in the 1920s, what you got was the Red Summer of 1919 when hundreds of Black people were killed. I think 13 Black soldiers were lynched for wearing their uniforms, returning from the war. You have this unexplained political campaign to say that these demands for Black liberty and equality were radical and dangerous and communist.

And I think we need to ask ourselves; if this game plan has been worked before, do we now know that it is again being applied? And we should watch for the signs of it being applied. Also we need to imagine if it hadn’t been applied. Imagine if America had listened to calls for Black equality in 1919 and they’d had civil rights in the 1920s, not the 1960s. America would be 40 years ahead of where it is now. It’s a tragedy that appeals for civil rights were tarred with being Bolshevik. It’s a tragedy for everybody.
5 Black contribution to the stuff that we’ve done. Not the story of how the exploitation of Black people through slavery was one of the biggest industries of the 18th century, nor how the cotton industry of the 19th century built on the enslavement of African Americans, accorded for 40 per cent of Britain’s exports and was the justification and the rationale for the damn civil war. Not the fact that the ‘scramble for Africa’ was one of the industries of the 19th century that barely almost brought Britain, France and other countries to war.

Black history is British history, it seeps out into everything. We’re not marginal. We’re not a side, we’re not a ‘nice to have an additional bit of colour’ for Black History Month. This is British history, it’s fundamental. Time and time again… and it’s not just Black history. Take the story of the Battle of Britain and the stories of the Polish and Czech pilots. They’ve never bothered to interview them! We don’t know about the Indian Army, the biggest volunteer army in the Second World War. The majority of soldiers who fought at Waterloo weren’t British. They were Belgian or Dutch or German or they spoke one of the German dialects. It’s a European battle, but we don’t know that.

The problem is the version of history we’ve got is bullshit, not that Black history needs to exist alongside this myopic, whitewashed history. It’s that history is wrong and it’s written out the chapters that explain who the hell we are. For me, this is Black history.

Black is British history

Sir Lenny Henry: How do you think the lack of media diversity shapes the way approaches history programmes?

David Olusoga: There’s a huge presumption that the audience is familiar with a small number of historical stories and we just need to keep doing those over and over again. There’s a lack of interest in new subjects and the focus of interest is on new approaches to old subjects. Who Do You Think You Are? You have created an interest in documentary evidence and emotional journeys which I think has the potential of encountering a broader range of stories.

But, the problem with the way we do Black history is, ‘here is a self-contained, hermetically sealed, Black history’ for the Black people who are watching so can tick a box or ‘here’s the

Sir Lenny Henry: That’s brilliant. I love to hear you talk about this because I never see you like this on television, you’re always so polite and smooth.

David Olusoga: Yes, because there’s the trope, the angry Black guy.

Sir Lenny Henry: You’re the Teddy Pendergrass of history, David!

David Olusoga: But it’s such a landmine to walk into, the Black guy is just... There we go, He’s angry, he’s unreasonable, he’s unbalanced. This isn’t objective, look at him, he’s emotional. For me to get emotional means I’m operating on the emotional spectrum and not the intellectual one. That would give them what they want.

Sir Lenny Henry: People accept youth-verified images of Black and Asian and working class people of colour, but when we are talking about adult programming, it’s a very different matter.

David Olusoga: Think about the workings of anti-Black racism and the idea, the fundamental idea, that Black people were childish, that they had a level of mental capacity that was equivalent to that of European children. Lord Lugard, who was a governor of Nigeria, described Nigerians, my ancestors, as attractive children. Generations, from the 1860s until the 1960s, African, middle-aged men, elderly men, were called ‘boy’ there’s an urge within anti-Black racism as it emerged in the new world to call and to think of Black people as children. As a result, you can see an industry that is not a comfort race that there is a comfort with Black people as children. Youth – I think you can see that in recruitment.

I’ve been doing this since I was 16. It’s an industry full of people who are quite happy to have a junior Black runner who they’re instructing and advising but less comfortable with the Black person is their boss. Less comfortable when there’s a Black person challenging their ideas. They’re

Sir Lenny Henry: Is there one historical/academic study you want the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity to embark upon? We’ve got all these academics waiting for David to tell us what to do. What would your recommendation be?

David Olusoga: I think we need to be smarter on the nexus between race and class. The thing that’s unspeakable is wealth allows people to build TV

The infantilisation of Blackness

Sir Lenny Henry: Do the shows have an overground appeal. We don’t just make Black history is, who are watching so we can keep doing those over and over again, stories and we just need to

David Olusoga: We learn about Black people in performing roles as almost the programming and Black people in performing roles as almost the intellectual... And so, the television’s lack of focus on Black stories and Black experiences, it is having more things like BBC Three and T4 because that’s where Black people are because Black people are children. It’s deeply, deeply subconscious. Making programmes about Black history – this is just one example of many – I

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Creating a programme talking honestly to children about race and prejudice was a ‘baptism of fire’ for broadcast journalist and newsreader Charlene White.

As Black Lives Matter protests took hold globally, it struck me that children were being left out of the conversation about race, racism and diversity. As someone who’d learnt about racism at an early age, having been a victim of abuse from other children, I feel strongly that children ought to be instrumental in the conversation. Excluding them allows stereotypes and ‘othering’ to continue for another generation.

Thankfully ITV felt the same when I suggested the idea which became IRL with Team Charlene, a magazine show dealing with racism in the UK, and how it impacts the lives of young people, through a mix of short films, animation and music. I have little to no experience on the programme-making side of television. In all honesty, I wasn’t necessarily ‘pitching’ as such when I spoke to them, but they loved the idea. They saw my passion and immediately agreed that it was something they wanted to be a part of.

And then began the baptism of fire. I had to quickly learn how to realistically put together a new studio-based kids programme, in a way that was engaging, entertaining and informative… during a pandemic. ITV agreed that ITN Productions were best placed to make it alongside ITV News – the company’s first children’s commission. I took on my friend Jessica Symons as executive producer of the show, and from the very start we were adamant that we wanted it to be a diverse mix of talent on the team. We were thankfully able to achieve that by using some of ITN’s team, and some fantastic young freelancers.

The commissioner, Gemma John-Lewis, helped to bring the idea from an image in my head to what was produced on screen. The passion that Gemma also had for the project was fabulous. Let’s not forget that this is something that had never been done before: ITV, ITN Productions and ITV News working on a children’s programme together. We really did, together, want to make a difference.

Finding a diverse cast for the show was the easy part. We knew we wanted a recognisable face from CITV, and Kerry Boyne fit the show perfectly. And we wanted a man with us in the studio… but how often do you see Black men in the counsellor role on TV? We wanted to change that, so sought out Rotimi Akinsete who thankfully loved the concept of the show and wanted to be involved.

Once those pieces were in place, we looked for music talent who could lift the show. Scouring social media to find young talent who were doing great things, we found King Caelan and Eva-Marie. At no point did we question whether there was ‘too much’ Black talent on-screen on one show. We wanted diverse talent, so we looked for it, found it, and used it. This was the same for the production team too and the end credits reflect that.

But working with a team that understands that and recognises the importance of it also made a difference. From the commissioner Gemma to the exec Jess, to me the creator, it was a non-negotiable part of the process of making the show. And that’s the key isn’t it? Yes, we were making something fun and informative, but we couldn’t make a show about race and racism without making a difference behind the scenes too. So, I’m proud of what we achieved, and the way that we did it.

Charlene White is a journalist and newsreader who has been lead presenter of ITV News London since 2019. IRL with Team Charlene aired on 3rd October 2020 and is available to watch on ITV Hub.

https://www.itv.com/hub/irl-with-team-charlene/10a0575a0001

Reprezentology takeaways
How one programme can address industry diversity issues

• Opportunities to address on-screen diversity should also be used to address diversity behind the cameras.
• Traditional production teams can work dynamically alongside freelance staff.
• Social media is an excellent source for locating diverse talent.
Abstract
This paper analyses research conducted throughout August and September 2020 examining the breakdown of diversity across key post-production sound team roles in the highest rated TV shows broadcast during the Autumn period of 2019 on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One. The data was drawn from Broadcast magazine’s quarterly reports on the highest rated shows (published online 15th September 2019), on screen credits and IMDB. This project also included interviews with a range of professionals working in post-production sound to identify barriers to career progression in this area. The research reveals a worrying absence of diversity in post-production sound teams specifically in drama, entertainment and factual.

Key words: diversity, post-production, sound, career progression, barrier

Emma Butt is a sound editor working in television post-production. Her research was commissioned by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity and supported by Dr Ellie Tomsett of Birmingham City University’s School of Media.

It is the pilot for a new grant initiative, Practitioners Investigating Media Industry Diversity (PIMID), matching experienced media professionals with academic mentors to conduct short-turnaround research in their own sector. There is information on applying for these grants at the end of this article.
Introduction

As my ethnic identity is not visibly evident, I have not personally faced racism in the workplace, although I have experienced racism in my lifetime. This research explores the barriers to career progression that relate to women, Black and ethnic minority sound professionals, and whether there are commonalities in experiences. Additionally, this project considers exactly what actions can be taken to remove these barriers to ensure wider inclusion in the post-production sound profession. As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 13 years, I am continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams.

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Research Methodology

As a starting point, the highest rated UK TV shows across the Autumn period of 2019 were identified. The industry magazine, Broadcast, publishes a quarterly list of the highest rated shows made for and broadcast by BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One, the date each show aired and the viewing role. For the purposes of this research from this list any live sporting events, shows which do not require post-production sound work (e.g. BBC1’s Strictly Come Dancing [2004–]), broadcasts of feature films (e.g. Bridget Jones Diary [2001]) and American made TV series were omitted from the data. Any shows where the information could not be found for the sound teams involved or were removed from the sample. (Only four shows fell into this category).

Using this information, I found the names of the sound teams involved on the specific episodes. This was achieved through a combination of searching on IMDB and reviewing the end screen credits. As the highest rated shows were from a variety of genres (e.g. drama, entertainment, factual) and the make-up (e.g. female, male) of the sound teams vary across each genre, I decided to focus on the key common role names found in each one. These are: Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor, Sound Effects Editor. With drama and feature films production, the roles of Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects Editor are covered by different people. In some cases, for example, on productions with high budgets, these roles may be undertaken by multiple people due to scale of the production. When producing factual and entertainment work, all three roles can be carried out by one individual. In order for the sound teams to ensure wider inclusion in the post-production sound profession, the importance of these roles to be fully understood I will briefly describe the key tasks.

As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 13 years, I am continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams.

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Interviews

To better understand the barriers people of ethnic or minority backgrounds and women are facing in progressing in their careers, I interviewed five participants: two white women and three men from ethnic minority backgrounds. Participant 1 was at a different stage in her career and faced different challenges. In the table below (Table 1) the ethnic background of participants is intentionally kept general, as to be more specific an industry where there are so few people from BAME backgrounds would make them identifiable.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a woman still at the early stage of her career, even after eight years working continuously in the television industry. She faced barriers trying to progress from assistant roles to becoming a mixer (progressing to different roles), and then from short form to longform content (progressing between genres in some cases). Participant 1 transitioned out as a runner and working within four different facilities in either runner, machine room or assistant roles over a 3.5-year period, she finally started working as a Re-Recording Mixer. After working as a Re-Recording Mixer on short form content for two years, she wanted to progress into longform content. However, she found her lack of experience in that genre meant people in hiring positions were unwilling to give her a chance, even though she had a proven track record of working successfully with clients in the same technical role. In order to make that progression into longform she had to go back a step in her career to assist level where she remains after almost 2 years.

She found that during her early career stages, she was not encouraged or given the opportunity to learn and train while working as a runner. She noted that ‘there was a hierarchy where you had to know certain places, keep your head down and if you were allowed into a studio you were lucky.’ She also noted that these studios lacked diversity across all aspects of identity. It was not until

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a male in his 40s from an ethnic minority background and had to take a similar approach in taking a career step back in order to progress. This participant had experienced a successful career in a non-sound role in his home country’s film and TV industry. He successfully transitioned into the same role in the UK film and TV industry. Participant 2 then decided to retrain in sound at University and try to develop a career in post-production sound. He found it difficult to pay after paying the university fees, he tried to find a staff position to give himself some financial stability, rather than working freelance. He started applying for jobs, emailing and meeting producers, but found he was turned down or received no response.

When asked if he felt his name, which is not one that would be considered ‘traditionally white British’, may have played a part in not getting responses he replied ‘yes, the short answer is yes’. Participant 2 did mention that this could only be an assumption on his part, as this bias is something that is hard to prove. He had considered changing his name on his CV but he ‘wasn’t prepared to do it’ as ‘that is my identity’.

It is important to note that numerous studies have demonstrated that name based racial discrimination is prevalent in the UK. A summary of the Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migrations and Markets Report, produced by Nuffield College, University of Oxford in 2019, highlighted that recruitment practices still discriminate against ethnic minorities. Researchers sent 3,200 applications to employers, which were identical in terms of skills and experience, but those with more and not having had a job in the ethnic background of these fictional candidates. The report concluded that:

On average, nearly one in four applicants for the majority group (24%) received a positive response (i.e. callback) from employers. The job search effort was less successful for ethnic minorities who, despite having similar qualifications and cover letters, needed to send 60% more applications to receive as many callbacks as the majority group. The discrimination encountered by minorities does not vary by gender. (Di Stasio and Heath 2019:1)

So, while Participant 2 may not be able to categorically say this was an issue for him in his career, there is certainly sufficient evidence to suggest that he may well be right.

One of the main barriers Participant 2 had experienced as a freelancer was ‘finding the work and getting the work’. Because you don’t look like the people they want to work with, they are uncomfortable with, and that comfort comes from trust and that trust comes from familiarity and similarity’. This was a challenge also faced by Participant 3 with her noting ‘There’s set people that people like to work with and if it’s not broke, don’t fix it, they have their circle of people and the boys they go to work with and they don’t want to break into that’. She comments that this circle of hiring (a who-you-know approach) is preventing more diversity within post-production sound. She concluded by saying that

‘People need to try to hire people who don’t look like them a bit more and go a little further and reach a little farther than their circle of friends’. (Stasios and Heath 2019:1)

Participant 3 was a white woman who has worked in sound post-production for over 20 years. She took a traditional route into her career, starting as a runner. “Well I like you, we get on, I thought if I’m seen to be powerful I was forced to go freelance’ she added. She commented ‘I never had to worry about being a freelance, I was forced to go freelance 13 years ago. She identified this move from staff member in a company to freelancer as one where, that led to career progression. While working in her last facility she was starting to supervise high-end dramas and was building up her CV in a management role. However, once she became a

freelancer the building up of experience in drama became second nature and she had ended up back working in the factual side of the industry on more independent projects. High-end drama work, although she had some credits, became harder to get as a freelance because contacts and she had a vital part of maintaining a career.

Part of me knows that if I had been there a couple of years longer and carried on working on those projects, when I went freelance I would have had more TV and film contacts and it would have been easier to carry on working in TV.

She believed her gender also played a part. She remembered she had a shad supervisor, with whom she was trying to get freelance work, saying to her: ‘Well I like you, we get on, but the problem is if you join our crew and you can out of what two you started dating and it ended badly, that would disrupt the entire balance of the crew and I’m not sure about taking on that kind of risk.

Following this exchange, she did not receive any offers of work from this man, arguably due to his sexist and heteronormative views about the role women play in a workplace (i.e. potential sexual partners rather than professionals with skills to offer). She recognises, as with many male dominated professions, that it is difficult to tell men times if her gender prevents her getting work.

Participants 4 and 5 were both men from an ethnic minority background who, after careers in similar industries, decided to try working in post-production sound. Participant 4 started

...
Analysis of the Continuing Drama Directors Scheme and sound scheme proposal

In May 2014 Directors UK, the professional association of over 7,000 director members working with the moving image in the UK, released a report titled Who’s Calling the Shots (2014). This report, widely reported in the media at the time, especially in industry circles (see The European Women’s Audiovisual network website [2014] as an example). The report showed a worrying decrease in the number of women employed over a two-year period specifically in drama, entertainment and comedy. The key to avoiding working in organisations that are resistant to their inclusion was for foundations to understand the workflow. This new knowledge enabled someone to shadow the specific role post-production sound scheme followed the BBC director example and enabled someone to show you are capable of the job through having relevant experience. The scheme involves shadowing opportunities that result in tangible credits in drama programming. The scheme is described on the Directors UK website and works in the following way:

As part of their training, each director will observe and participate in the entire production process of an episode of a show, from pre to post-production, and will ultimately take the helm for one full episode to gain a directing credit. The scheme also offers the possibility of employment after their training, as there is an ambition for the series to hire directors within nine months for a full directing contract. If the director has shown that they can meet the standards required.

The scheme has been successful with Directors UK’s latest Who’s Calling the Shots report (2018), showing that Casualty, Holby City and Doctors had a notable increase in the number of episodes directed by women. The data revealed a 14.8%, 14.4% and 16.2% increase respectively over a three-year period. The report concluded that ‘running, equal’ interventions on participating organisations could produce positive results but that ‘this intervention activity needs to be implemented across other programmes in other genres, to replicate progress towards greater gender equality’ (bid).

As many of the barriers identified in the directing profession have also come to light in this study, I believe this model would work if replicated in a particular way across sound teams on high-end drama. As one of the interviewees for this research emphasised, credits are everything. In order to progress in high-end drama and more high-end work generally, you need to show you are capable of the job through having relevant credits on your CV. The only way to get the credits is by someone giving you an opportunity, but as this research has already shown, there is often a reluctance from people in hiring positions to give new or ‘unknown’ people a chance.

When budgets are tight, and people are working under pressure, questions such as ‘What if they don’t understand the workflow?’ or ‘What if training them eats into tight budgets?’ often become relevant to hiring decisions. The risk needs to be eliminated for both the people in the hiring positions and those participating in the scheme. By following the example of the BBC Continuing Drama Directors’ Scheme, one could also work to diversify the post-production sound industry.

Let us first consider how this scheme could work for those at mid-career stage. If someone has been already actively working in the post-production sound industry for a certain amount of time, but in another genre (e.g. factual) they would already have most of the transferable knowledge and skills relevant to high-end drama production. The main knowledge they would be lacking is an understanding of the workflow. If a post-production sound scheme followed the BBC director example and enabled someone to show the specific role they are interested in for several episodes of a recurring drama (in the role of a Dialogue Editor for example) they would need to work with an independent source, this could enable them to show you are capable of the job through having relevant experience. The following could be developed while they have someone there as a support system; someone to whom they can ask questions or request guidance. Having completed this phase, and with their new understanding of the workflow, they would then be able to take a full episode alone which would receive a full credit. I believe this approach would help in starting to address the issue of lack of diversity in post-production sound roles across the industry.

If the role of the participant was funded through an independent source, this could eliminate the risk for both sides the person hiring and the person participating. That way the participant is not risking financial hardship while trying to progress in the industry. If they could participate in training without being paid immediately their participation to those who are without economic resources to fall back on.
We have to ask why emphasis in recent years has been put on diversity in front of the camera whereas post-production sound, which accounts for 50% of a TV show or film and is an integral part of the storytelling process, is forgotten about?

As a result of the inflexibility of existing hiring practices, people from different backgrounds have felt the need to create their own companies in order to progress within the industry. There are no opportunities or schemes currently available for training, or progression for post-production sound freelance, especially for those moving between short form or factual into drama.

We have to ask why emphasis in recent years has been put on diversity in front of the camera whereas post-production sound, which accounts for 50% of a TV show or film and is an integral part of the storytelling process, is forgotten about? Recently, the UK’s Association of Motion Picture Sound Engineers (AMPS) and the US Motion Picture Sound Engineers (MPSE) and Cinema Audio Society (CAS) wrote an open letter to Hollywood seeking screen credit changes to reflect parity with other key creative professionals.

Current sound teams face being placed low down on the end credit role while positions in picture-related departments appear much higher. Productions such as Killing Eve (2018-) and the documentary 100 Vaginas (2019) are regularly lauded as having diverse teams in terms of gender and ethnicity. On closer inspection that diversity is not achieved with post-production sound teams.

Until vital steps are taken, and hiring practices move beyond simply ‘who you know’, it is unlikely the participation of women, Black and minority ethnic sound professionals will show any growth and improvement in equality. Furthermore, it is likely that the stories highlighted in this research about the barriers to career progression will remain.

References


Brook, Orian, David O’Brien and Mark Taylor (2020) Culture is bad for you: Inequality in the cultural and creative industries. Manchester: Manchester University Press


PIMID Grants

Practitioners Investigating Media Industry Diversity

The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity is offering 5 grants of up to £3K each in the current financial year to support short turnaround research.

The purpose of the PIMID research grants is to better inform policy and practice that will address diversity deficits across different sectors of the media industry.

The PIMID grants are open to media practitioners with a minimum of 5 years professional experience who wish to look more closely at the challenges and opportunities in their own sector. Each successful applicant will be teamed with an academic mentor and the research will need to be completed by May 31st 2021.

We would expect the research to take 4 weeks full time or 8-12 weeks part time. The findings would be considered for publication in the journal Representology.

To apply, please email Professor Diane Kemp, Director of the Centre (diane.kemp@bcu.ac.uk) with a brief outline of:

1. The central question you would like to address and evidence of why it is important now
2. The aim and methodology of your proposed research
3. Your current role, your qualifications and experience relevant to the proposal
4. How your research might inform wider and more effective participation in particular roles and sectors of the media industry
5. Two professional referees who may be contacted in relation to your application

The closing date for applications is January 29th 2021.

Your application will be considered by the Board of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre and you can expect a response within 3 weeks of the closing date.
The future of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry - models and ownership

By Dr Peter L. Block

Should Ofcom continue to regulate diversity in the UK broadcast industry?

In light of growing criticism of Ofcom as a diversity regulator, the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity commissioned Dr Peter Block, a former CEO of the Broadcast Equality & Training Regulator (BETR), to examine Ofcom’s history and effectiveness in improving workforce diversity and to consider what alternative models might work better in the future.
Abstract
This research, commissioned by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, examines the matter of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry. The findings are captured in six models of diversity clustered under the three themes of: Ofcom relinquishing the obligation; Ofcom continuing to manage the process or Ofcom devolving the matter to an independent agency. This paper explains the rationale for arriving at these models and what this means for the future of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry.

Introduction
Improvement in the diversity of the UK broadcast industry workforce to reflect the communities it serves has been an unwritten target across the sector key for almost 20 years. It was a matter enshrined in law with the Communications Act 2003, later embodied by the Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BTSR) in 2005 and renamed as the Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BETR) in 2009. The BETR was dissolved by Ofcom in 2010. In 2016 the matter of workforce diversity was explicitly written into the renewal of the BBC Charter (ICMS 2016: 7). As part of the Charter renewal, Ofcom became the external regulator of the BBC on all aspects of its work, including matters of diversity (Ofcom 2020a).

Despite a long list of initiatives, projects and incentives devised to improve the diversity of the UK creative industries, the workforce still fails to reflect the diversity of the wider population.

The legislative framework to monitor diversity
The Communications Act 2003 requires Ofcom:
…to take the steps it considers appropriate to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, people of different racial origins and for disabled people, in relation to employment and training by the television and radio broadcasters it regulates (Ofcom 2011b).

To that end, UK licensed television and radio broadcasters must, as a condition of their licences, make arrangements for promoting equality opportunities and, in making and reviewing those arrangements, must have regard to any relevant guidance published by Ofcom.

The expectation was that by monitoring and collating workforce data on gender, race and disability from the licence holders with more than 20 staff it would shine a light on the lack of diversity in the industry. It was anticipated that reporting on this matter would stimulate change to improve the situation. Ofcom initially reported on the workforce data gathered from the broadcasters. In 2005 Ofcom handed the matter over to the BTSR to monitor the training and skills component. In 2009 the BTSR, renamed BETR when the BTSR picked up the remit of monitoring equal opportunities, it was closed down by Ofcom in 2010 as a consequence of the incoming government.

The model the BETR applied combined quantitative data on the workforce along with a maturity model that captured qualitative data. A maturity model evaluates progress on a hierarchy of statements mapped to a set of attributes. In this case the model mapped 22 attributes of diversity inclusion, training and skills. This approach provided a snapshot of the progress broadcasters were making to improve the diversity of their workforce. It also captured their training and staff development programmes which underpinned their efforts to improve the diversity of that workforce (BETR 2010 & BTSR 2006).

With the incoming Cameron government of 2010, Ofcom closed down the BETR with the expectation that the relevant clauses of the Communications Act 2003 would be revoked. Ofcom took no action on the matter of diversity or training within the UK television and radio industry until 2016. Under pressure from a number of stakeholders Ofcom was obliged to set up some form of diversity monitoring and regulation. In 2016 Ofcom restarted its annual monitoring of diversity in the television and radio industries and to date has published three annual diversity monitoring reports (Ofcom 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a). The fourth report that amalgamated UK licensed television and radio broadcasters into a single document was published in November 2020. Despite this renewed focus the regulator on diversity in the industry there have been many critical voices, such as Sir Lenny Henry (BETR 2012). The expectation, demanding that Ofcom should be more robust on this matter. More recently Professor David Olusoga in his 2020 MacTaggart lecture argued that Ofcom needs to do more or allow another organisation to pick up the mantle to hold the industry to account.

The stakeholders and the policy network
This research interviewed 11 stakeholders and their insights and comments informed the recommended models for diversity regulation presented in this paper. For the purposes of this research those interviewed or contacted for an opinion were classified as incumbents, challengers and independent voices. The incumbents represented Ofcom and the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN), the challengers were drawn from the Campaign for Broadcasting Equality, the BAME TV Task Force, the Coalition for change, the TV Collective along with Professor David Olusoga. The independent sources included representatives from the Employment and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the BETR / BTSR, the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) and CAMEO a media research group at Leicester University. These interviews provided a picture of the diversity policy communities within the UK broadcast industry. The interviews also contributed an understanding of the stance taken by the different interest groups. Although three individuals representing organisations did not respond to a request for a call, it made no material impact on the recommendations presented in this paper.

Terminology and definitions of regulation
The last piece of scene setting concerns matters of terminology, definitions and theory that relate to regulation in general and diversity regulation in particular. Dacko and Hart produced a helpful treatise on media regulation (Dacko & Hart 2005: 21). At the time Martin Hart was an employee of Ofcom and their analysis resonates well with this current work. They suggest that there are four archetypal models of regulation. These are: Regulation: ‘a state intervention in a private sphere of activity to realize public purposes’ (Francis 1996); Statutory regulation: ‘…mandated or restricted by government rules, enforced through legal penalties’ (Boddeley 1992); Co-regulation: ‘…self-regulatory schemes that are backed up by some statutory force’ was the model for the BTSR / BETR and self-regulation: ‘…the voluntary control of business conduct and performance by a business itself’ (ibid).

The options ranging from self-regulation to regulation indicate a hierarchy of transfer of the levers of control from internal to external management. All four models require the trust of the stakeholders of any organisation charged with overseeing the process. All parties have to sign up to the process and the models require codes of practice to be agreed by all parties and the stipulation of sanctions, remedial actions, fines and in the final analysis removal of the right to conduct the work

Regulatory models in both theory and practice indicate that a co-regulatory or self-regulatory model can result in greater stakeholder engagement. However, the ‘challengers’ to the status quo do need some form of process of implied light touch regulation delivers results.

BECTU was quite clear in its opposition to co-regulation during the Ofcom consultation on the matter (BECTU 2005). The demise of the BETR was applauded by some as it represented too much of the light touch regulation. However, if any regulatory system is to deliver its vision and targets. Any new or revised system requires time to be bedded in and gain acceptance. Key to acceptance will be the oversight by a management board to whom the operational team reports, consisting of trusted industry voices. Ofcom indicates that the current approach launched in 2016 to monitoring diversity is a five-year plan. Unfortunately, this is not published as a strategic plan. A model that predominantly relies on data gathering from which recommendations are developed appears on the face of it a passive reactive process.

Whatever form diversity regulation takes, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS) states that any regulation should be: transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted – only at cases
where action is needed (DBEIS 2020). An approach that is acceptable by all stakeholders needs to be managed and delivered by a skilled team applying justifiable interventions that are based on trust, independence and effective sanctions. It should not be just another ‘cost to do business’ data gathering exercise. Good regulation should go beyond the notion of the ‘stick’ but provide a supportive engagement with those being regulated.

The first step in this research was to review the literature that has examined workforce diversity in the broadcast industry and the data models that describe the size and composition of the sector.

Creative Industries (CI) data matters

The matter of confidence in the industry’s data requires particular attention. Definitive data about the broadcast workforce is essential to enable any meaningful analysis of the industry (Block 2005).

Robust, reliable, transparent and consistent data is needed to monitor changes in the industry workforce.

For this review a high-level scan of key data sources was conducted along with papers that have referenced key data sets included:

• The Ofcom dataset drawn from its 2020 annual report that combined diversity data from television and radio broadcasters with more that 100 full time UK based staff (Ofcom 2020b)
• Project Diamond – the ‘three cuts’ plus the more detailed analysis released during this research (CDN 2018, 2019, 2020)
• DCMS economic estimates for the Creative Industries up to 2018 along with the use of an economic estimates tool on the DCMS website (DCMS 2019 & 2020)
• BFI Employment in the film industry requests of the ONS and collated in its reports (BFI 2019)
• ScreenSkills, Government Equalities Office and academic research sources
• Various ONS Freedom of Information (FOI) data requests from the Greater London Authority and other independent researchers, of which, the data tables remain in the public domain on the ONS site, and finally,
• Searches using Nomis (Nomis online), the ONS service that provides current UK labour market statistics

The CI data as presented by the agencies cited above gives rise to issues that make it easy to misunderstand, and according to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), possibly misuse the data (OSR 2018). There is a degree of ambiguity over the composition of the workforce within the creative industries as it comprises those deemed to have a creative job and those who are non-creative.

With the exception of the ONS, the Ofcom dataset should be the most reliable source within the television industry. However, changes in the datasets over the period 2016 -20, and the format and style of presentation makes it difficult for even the informed reader to see what each Ofcom report in context with its predecessor. It is argued that there is one of face it of a lack of transparency on the data and the actions taken by Ofcom to engage and challenge individual broadcasters. An integrated database is needed for the independent researcher and analyst to access. Furthermore, the review suggests that any changes in gender balance or BAME diversity are as a consequence of any industry wide interventions and not due to individual broadcasters’ efforts to change their practices and their support for an individual’s development.

The data suggests that the television industry is at best just tracking the changes across the wider industrial base.

In its reports Ofcom take as its datum line the national figure of 12% BAME in the UK workforce. In the creative industries (particularly in London) this is closer to 20%. This suggests that the industry data gives rise to three recommendations for improved reporting. There need to be clearly delineated data models for the creative industries which avoid the ambiguities of the current framework. Defining and reporting on the audio-visual (AV) sector could be a step in the right direction. Secondly, Ofcom in partnership with the ONS should produce an annual definitive industry benchmark dataset for the AV sector overall along with specific data on the Film, TV and Radio workforce. Other reports make similar calls, but further research is required. Thirdly, all research should validate labour market data on the creative industries by triangulating third party findings with ONS data.

The academic literature

Much has been written about the creative industries workforce; particularly about those working in the film and television industries. This research examined 42 studies and reports from 2005 to 2020 that offer insights into the UK broadcast industry. It covers academic research that is sponsored and independent, independent research groups and think tanks, sector-based organisations, EU regulators and other international comparisons plus third-party research that cite the media sector along with other sectors.

For over 15 years, various academic research groups have examined the matter of inclusion and diversity in the creative industries. The CAMEo Evidence Review (CAMEo 2018) collated 80 research studies on diversity that had examined film, television, animation, video games and visual effects (VFX) industries published between 2012 and 2016. 34 were academic articles, 40 were industry reports and six were a mix of books, book chapters, and other sources.

By coincidence, the CAMEo review identified 42 documents that focused on the television industry of which interventions to increase diversity were mentioned by 26 studies. The CAMEo Review noted two forms of interventions discussed in the literature: to empower or transform. Empower was defined as enhancing an individual’s capacity to enter and progress within existing industry pathways. In this research the efforts of the TV Collective and Women in Film & Television (NFTV) fall into that. Transform was defined as sector practice to remove barriers to more equal participation which is exemplified by the BFI Diversity standards, Diamond and the work of Ofcom to monitor the sector. The CAMEo recommendations inform the regulatory options put forward in this research. The academic literature indicates that the industry is data rich but information poor. There has been a great emphasis on monitoring and gathering quantitative data measures but limited focus on practical interventions and qualitative research.

Some academic studies have referred to this situation as an ‘empty shell’ (Block 2017). There is a danger of insufficient information to enable change. The focus on monitoring the industry, the research studies and reports from EU regulators and other independent researchers, of which, the data tables remain in the public domain on the ONS site, and finally, searches using Nomis (Nomis online), the ONS service that provides current UK labour market statistics
Independent research

A great deal has been written on the issue of diversity and inclusion (D&I) across all the dimensions of workplace inequality and employment sectors in the UK – public and private. This paper shows that the broadcast industry is no exception and has the attention of academics, think tanks and industry insiders. While the moral imperative for tackling D&I is well made, the UK broadcast industry of television and radio, along with its fellow traveller the film industry, still struggles to increase workforce diversity.

In the Parker Review Update it was noted that the target of “One by 2021” – one full BAME member on a FTSE100 or 250 board was likely to be met (Parker 2020). The FT report from 2019, Striving for Inclusion, ranks the top 700 European companies. Places Sky as the highest ranked media company at 113, the BBC at 403 and Channel 4 at 409 (Boulton 2019). A reader might be forgiven for concluding that this is not a great testament to change, therefore, given the public pronouncements and implied efforts by the two PSB organisations.

...the BTSR represents an audacious attempt by the Broadcasters to ensure Ofcom’s BAME member on a FTSE100 or 250 board was likely to be met (Parker 2020). The FT report from 2019, Striving for Inclusion, ranks the top 700 European companies. Places Sky as the highest ranked media company at 113, the BBC at 403 and Channel 4 at 409 (Boulton 2019). A reader might be forgiven for concluding that this is not a great testament to change, therefore, given the public pronouncements and implied efforts by the two PSB organisations.

The history of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry

2003 – 2005: Complying with the Communications Act 2003

Initially Ofcom gathered data and reported in general terms on the composition of the broadcasters. Broadcasters were specifically required to report their training and development priorities and programmes. No-one was happy with the situation. It did not deliver any value to the broadcasters and was not a process to stimulate change in the industry.

Following consultation with the industry, the proposal for a co-regulator embodied in the Broadcaster Training and Skills Regulator (BTSR) was accepted by the Ofcom Content Board. It was endorsed by the Main Board:

The ambition of the co-regulatory approach was to build a partnership model focusing on development and improvement. The BTSR set up a media national training award, aligned the broadcasters’ returns with the ‘Investors in People’ programme and held an annual conference at BAFTA. The objective of this approach was to use the data gathered as an impetus to stimulate change. Another aim was to share best practice and support broadcasters who were struggling to make a difference. A mentoring scheme was set up based on a portfolio of case studies. Initially the BTSR focused on training & skills (T&S) and in 2009 reported on workforce diversity. The final report from the renamed BTSR was published in 2010.

2010 – 2016: Ofcom took no action to monitor or issue guidance to broadcasters

During this period, the requirement to take action over diversity was set aside by Ofcom in the expectation the matter would be revisited by the 2010 Cameron Government. The literature review for this project attests that Ofcom along with most EU media regulators considered equal opportunities (EO) and training & skills (T&S) a national issue. However, Ofcom carried forward training and development expertise from within and outside the industry, and designed and launched the industry in raising its training and development game (BTSR 2008).

2005 – 2010: The Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BTSR) and the Broadcast Equality & Training Regulator (BETR)

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The ChArttered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) states ‘Given all this attention, it is perhaps surprising that we find little discussion on what works’ in diversity. Or more precisely, what strategies and practices seem to be the best bet for increasing workplace diversity and inclusion’ (CIPD 2019).

Green Park Leadership 10,000 notes the accidental D&I improvement through company listing changes and concludes that business leaders need to: “tone down meaningless rhetoric” (Green Park 2018 & 2019).

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Oftcom also aimed to examine the steps broadcasters were taking to monitor and improve diversity. The first report was published in 2017.

Diversity regulation today

Turning to the current situation, in 2020 there are three key reporting systems; Diamond, the BFI diversity standards and Oftcom’s diversity monitoring annual report. This paper focuses on Ofcom’s approach. It is argued as a matter of opinion that an examination of Ofcom’s current regulatory framework (2016 - 2017) reveals a lack of transparency. Although the additional data provided by Ofcom to support its 2020 report through the on-line tool (Oftcom 2020a) is very helpful, the matter remains a challenge to unpack. In 2020 only those broadcasters with over 100 staff were assessed due to the pandemic and the understanding pressures on staff at the smaller companies to submit data to Ofcom.

The complexity of sizing the workforce in the UK broadcast industry has been already highlighted. This raises a number of issues regarding Ofcom’s data model. It uses the national Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) figure of 12% BAME as a performance baseline (ONS 2018). Oftcom notes that the London workforce has a minority ethnic group (MEG) of 35% and 31% in Manchester, the two cities where ‘most broadcasters are based’.

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Oftcom argues that the monitoring and the improved dataset are having some impact. This research suggests that any change has tracked the wider industrial landscape reported elsewhere – the cause and effect not due to Ofcom’s intervention. An improved or more complete dataset is not necessarily an indicator of change but a greater response from the industry. The improvement by four percentage points(4) from 2016 to 2019 still leaves 16% unknown or not disclosed, and this still raises questions about the confidence level in the dataset. An inspection of the data from this subset of the UK broadcast industry workforce for the 2020 report still shows 12% not collected or disclosed data gap in the television industry, with 6% for radio. Although the Skills Report 2020 report notes the improvement in underrepresentation of those drawn from minority ethnic groups (MEG) to senior management (8%); it does not highlight the significant data gap of 18% not collected, not reported within this senior management cohort.

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Furthermore, given that this report is from companies with 100 or more staff, it would be expected that these companies have effective workforce HR policies for managing workforce diversity. This matter requires more investigation by Ofcom.

Ofcom has focused on its obligation to monitor diversity but not training & skills. There are numerous reports to indicate that to do the first, you need the second. This is a lost opportunity to encourage, support, and if needed, hold to account the licence holders.

Evaluation is a key enabler to effect change. A matter that Ofcom recognises in its latest report:

This year, we asked broadcasters to describe how they evaluated their most successful initiatives and actions. We are disappointed that generally broadcasters did not provide a detailed response to this question, beyond noting outcomes against targets. This is a barrier to demonstrating the transparency and accountability which our diversity monitoring and reporting aims to increase (Ofcom 2020b 26).

There is a need for Ofcom to hold broadcasters to account on the evaluation of their diversity and inclusion programmes. Ofcom asserts that it will ‘take enforcement action against those broadcasters who did not respond to our request for information’ (ibid). According to the document linked to the Ofcom 2020 report it would seem that Ofcom does not have the one company has been put on notice of the possible imposition of a statutory obligation for breach of its requirement to report on the diversity of its workforce in 2017 and 2018 (Ofcom 2019 19).

Findings and regulatory options

Data models

There need to be clearly articulated data models for the creative industries workforce. The models should avoid the ambiguities of the current framework. Defining and reporting on an audiovisual sector would be a step in the right direction. Ofcom in partnership with the ONS should produce annual definitive industry benchmark data for Film, TV, Radio and AV. All research should validate labour market data on the creative industries and sub-sectors by triangulating third party findings with ONS data.

The future of diversity regulation

The options set out below fall under three themes: (A) Ofcom relinquishes, (B) Ofcom manages or (C) Ofcom devolves. None are mutually exclusive and elements within each could form part of a final proposal.

(A) Ofcom relinquishes the obligation

1. The national diversity model

There is a case to be made that despite the Communications Act 2003 and the matter of diversity being written into the BBC Charter that this is not for Ofcom to regulate. However, it is a matter for the Employment and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) based on the counterfactual model. In this option regulation is provided by the EHRC based on precise prescription. This model would be more robust in comparison to the Ofcom based model and would put broadcasting under a similar statutory imposition of a statutory model.

(B) Ofcom manages

3. Ofcom ‘tight touch’ Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)

This approach maintains the ‘as is’ model where Ofcom retains the light touch (EHRC regulatory function of the annual monitoring process. However, it needs to be more rigorous in following up on its annual reports and to be more robust in requiring compliance from the licence holders with its recommendations and reporting on the matter. A significant aspect of any monitoring system is the skillset of the regulatory team. Ofcom could continue to gather the data but devolve the qualitative evaluation of the broadcasters’ efforts to an independent assessment by D&I and Training & Skills specialists. This external team would be more robust in following up on the expectations set in the Thinking Out of the Box publication.

2. The whistleblower

Although not directly related to this study; interviewees in the challenger group made it clear that many media workers not only feel discriminated against but disenfranchised and unsupported. This is more keenly felt if they are not members of BECTU.

Alongside the EHRC role is the need for a media workers ombudsman to protect the whistleblower. This would be set up as an independent arbitrator on matters of discrimination and beyond the EHRC remit.

(C) Ofcom devolves

5. Co-regulation redux - beyond compliance

This option is about the development of an effective diversity regulator as a partnership between broadcasters, Ofcom and EHRC. It will apply an amalgam of quantitative and qualitative measures to fully evaluate the broadcasters. Research shows that monitoring is not sufficient to stimulate and encourage change. Evaluation is the key to encouraging and supporting change. This approach underpins the Ofcom model with a National Training Award, alignment with Investors in People and co-monitoring based on a portfolio of case studies. There should be a focused push at the leadership of the industry to be exemplars who demonstrate change. This would be an independent body established by Ofcom to deliver on its remit. It would cover all who broadcast, supply and work to those companies that have an Ofcom licence. With the fragmentation of the sector there is a case to be made that it should gather evidence from all suppliers who employ 20 or more UK based staff (circa 43 companies) or are subsidiaries of international groups. It would also gather data on the freelancers employed across the sector.

6. The digital media regulator

In a radical shift from the demarcation between the broadcast industry and film this option would establish a single regulator that incorporates all efforts to date from Ofcom, Ofcom, Pact, and CDN. The incumbents, stakeholders expressed the view that they need a regulator to address the lack of diversity in the sector are in silos. This approach recognises the paradox of fragmentation of the industry while at the same time having concentration of powers. It is an aspirational model for the sector to develop over the next two to three years.

Indicative cost models

It is not usual to provide a cost model in a study of this nature. However, this project is all about the practical realities of delivering an effective diversity regulator. The staffing and management of this regulatory function are key to its success. The impression gathered in this research is that the current arrangements for diversity regulation to be managed by Ofcom are not sufficient resources.

It does not require a large team to manage and deliver diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry. What is needed is a supportive board and an advisory panel that can bring expertise to support an effective administrative team. In addition, all models need sufficient funds to call upon the services of qualified contractors at particular periods in the reporting cycle. This would involve data analysis to interrogate and present the data from the broadcasters whilst cross referencing it with data from the ONS; a small team of D&I specialists who can inspect, validate and assist the efforts of the broadcasters to meet the specific and general recommendations made by the regulator, and workshop facilitators to run developmental workshops possibly in partnership with ScreenSkills and CDN.

With the exception of the first two regulatory models, with Ofcom handing over their remit to third party and the ‘as is’ model, the requirement to staff and resource a regulator is broadly the same at about £150,000 per year. Under the co-regulatory model of the BETR the funding was provided by the broadcasters in proportion to their size. The smaller organisations, particularly small radio stations, were not required to contribute.

Addressing outstanding issues, questions and further research

Whatever the model of diversity regulation to emerge from this current effort; it must be framed by a set of requirements, tasks and targets. Even if it remains an internal entity within Ofcom it needs to be clearly differentiated from other departments at Ofcom. It needs to operate as a functional element.

There is a need for Ofcom to demonstrate how it has followed up on its recommendations in its diversity reports to date and develop a quantitative evaluation tool. It is not clear why Ofcom dropped gathering data on training and skills, which would have indicated the action taken by broadcasters to develop their workforce, including explicit actions over diversity and inclusion. It has already been stated that a self-evaluation maturity model can provide an effective quantitative tool to gather data on an organisation’s progress in improving D&I.

Although this research has proposed six regulatory frameworks, there are many matters of scope and powers that require further discussion. For example, should the regulator set targets with each broadcaster? This also raises the issue above: defining diversity within the sector. There is a need for further research on this matter. However, as an interim measure more could be added to the Ofcom document Guidance: Diversity in Broadcasting (Ofcom 2019d).

On data gathering, there is a need to have further research to establish an agreed data model that can be used by all interested parties. For the regulator, should data on production supply companies, contractors and freelancers be gathered as part of the annual data gathering exercise?
Reprezentology takesaways
What does a fit media regulator do to improve workforce diversity?

- Defines diversity and identifies what types of under-representation need to be addressed.
- Ensures reliable diversity data collection is standardised across the media industry.
- Sets targets that will effectively address diversity deficits across different media sectors.
- Investigates and holds accountable those media organisations who fail to comply.
- Is itself transparent and publicly accountable.

Notes
1. The complete list is available in the full report on the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity website: https://bcsassets.blob.core.windows.net/pcwOSR/the-future-of-diversity-regulation-in-uk-broadcasting-industry-final-135241701434666207.pdf

References


When the taxi door opens, a little man, shorter than I’d imagined, wearing tight trousers, an unbuttoned brightly coloured shirt and a purple faux fur collar cape neck warmer, bounds out. I look to his feet. ‘He’s wearing Charlie Wote,’ I murmur, ‘and it’s London weather, chilly!’

‘Hello Fela.’ His reply is ebullient in his gravelly voice: ‘Where are we going man?’ I lead the way. We’re due to go into Africa. It’s Africa music.’

Looking back on his time heading the BBC radio programme Black London in the early 1990s, Dr David Dunkley Gyimah considers how the lack of archives affects the understanding of Black culture and experiences.

When the taxi door opens, a little man, shorter than I’d imagined, wearing tight trousers, an unbuttoned brightly coloured shirt and a purple faux fur collar cape neck warmer, bounds out. I look to his feet. ‘He’s wearing Charlie Wote,’ I murmur, ‘and it’s London weather, chilly!’

‘Hello Fela.’ His reply is ebullient in his gravelly voice: ‘Where are we going man?’ I lead the way. We’re due to go into Africa. It’s Africa music.’

The story mainly comes from the archive of Black London, a radio show on BBC Greater London Radio (GLR) serving London’s Black listeners. It was 1991. John Major had succeeded Thatcher, a recession was about to take hold of the UK and Britain would soon leave the ERM. The UK’s creative media, particularly youth, had been going through a purple patch: The Big Breakfast, The Word, Horizon were the zeitgeist. The UK’s creative media, particularly youth, had been going through a purple patch: The Big Breakfast, The Word, Horizon were the zeitgeist. The UK’s creative media, particularly youth, had been going through a purple patch: The Big Breakfast, The Word, Horizon were the zeitgeist.

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We record the best part of an hour with Fela but, because of the programme’s format, can only broadcast five minutes. At the end of the show, one of the world’s most revered performers asks firstly when we can get something to eat and secondly where we’re going clubbing.

Imagine that! Imagine that happening with Jay-Z. Imagine getting to the doors of Gossips and quietly convincing the bouncer that the man in the brightly coloured garments is Fela Kuti, a world superstar. Jarrett, who would go on to work with Kofi Annan as a director of the African Progress Panel, reminds me we all hopped into my Honda Prelude. He vividly recalls the evening’s events with Fela.

The Voice newspaper called the programme ‘informative, interesting and lively’ as it set out to attract a broad audience both Black and white. A rapper, Me Phis Me, who was riding at the height...
That was until last month when, during lockdown, I rediscovered in my garage recordings of the programme on cassette and quarter-inch reel. One reads ‘Bernie Grant election debate’. As I’m writing this, I’m two hours away from a presentation with an archive specialist to the Federation Internationale des Archives de Télévision and Save Our Archive – organisations involved in retrieving archive. At their online Conference 2020 we’re pitching against Alibaba Media, Zimbabwe and RTI (Radio et Télévision intervienante). We’re hopeful, but win or lose the obvious question needs answering: So what? Who cares about a programme from 30 years ago?

Celebrated cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides a tangible framework. ‘The most important thing an archive can do,’ he says, ‘is to ask or allow us to interrogate those moments of transition because they are often also the moment of high creativity. We cannot see from our privileged position where those ruptures are most likely to occur or in what direction they may lead to.’

It’s long acknowledged how media shapes people’s view of the world, yet Ayseha Taylor-Camara, currently a PhD student at Internationale des Archives de Télévision and Save our Archive’s Voices of Black Britain Project, fears that, “when you don’t see. I become alarmed when I see how the modern media sets the narrative for people of colour when there’s so much more from what we see. It’s really important to show who we are ourselves and other people of colour who have trod the path before us. It’s a truth seeking.’

Before Black London

Alex Pascall arrived in Britain from Grenada in 1959. His early career was as a musician, and he went on to manage the Notting Hill Carnival in 1974. He created the BBC radio show Black Londoners. In a September 2020 profile for the Guardian titled ‘Alex Pascall: the broadcaster who gave a voice to Black Britain – and is now taking on the BBC’, Pascall told interviewer Joseph Harker that BBC black voices didn’t have there was an audience for the programme, so at first it only aired once a month. Four years later it ran every day. Pascall, a versatile performer, interviewed A-listers such as Bob Marley and Muhammad Ali and captured race relations at the time in his 1976 reports from the Notting Hill Carnival. There are smatterings of archive online that give you a sense of Pascall’s velvety smooth presenting style and a show he says he largely spent his own money funding. ‘It’s how he’s currently seeking redress from the BBC. ‘We trust as much as we hear we do as we see,’ says Bernard P Achampong, founder of the innovative indie Unedited and a board member of Audio UK. Achampong, citing the concept of ‘Sankofa’ which in the Twi language of Ghana equates to ‘Go and retrieve from the past’, sees radio’s heritage as emblematic of the oral traditions of how Black communities learn about news and storytelling. ‘There’s something in our own history, oral traditions and what we’ve reinvented,’ he says, ‘that has so much a premium, a high price tag than maybe for other communities.’

Achampong sees a link between the dearth of what he refers to as the ‘Intelligent Black Voices of the past’ like Fela or Marsha Howard whose voices aren’t heard on mainstream radio. ‘It’s important to reclaim this space,’ he says. Importantly too, he adds that archive provides a situatedness to re-create stories from the past and also provide a sense of provence for talent now successful. ‘Once people see these voices, we’re able to link them back to things that how they have gone on before and how they’ll happen again. If we’re aware of what happened before, we’re more empowered.’

My conversation with Achampong inspires an experiment. Kwame Kwaten and his band are on the retrieved archives from my garage – and he is now one of the UK’s most innovative musicians and music executives, managing Shola Ama and Laura Mvula with whom he has a number of management credits including Jay-Z, Mick Jagger, Tom Jones and Seal. With the help of a friend, we recorded an interview with a plane call on a Sunday morning and I play him the recording. ‘It’s a great day. I love playing on Kiss FM. That’s the proper UK Black memory,’ he says, assured there is ‘really little documentation of the 90s, compared with the 80s and 70s. We’re all in the moment. The ethics at the time was, “put your camera away, just dance at a rave”’. Kwaten has requested the audio which he intends to reproduce with photos from that time.

A week after my meeting with Fela, I was at Britsh Academy. One of many highlights, I saw the tiny suited figure of Seun Kuti (Fela’s younger son) take to the stage and, to a call and response, energise the crowd. Today
Strangers in a strange land

Paralympian Will Norman suggests that disability representation in the media is not the goal, but only a first step towards truly meaningful inclusion.
The release of a new film version of Roald Dahl’s The Witches recently caused a stir among people living with limb loss, who felt that the representation of the witches’ three-fingered hands reinforced a stigma linking their disabilities to dark and untrustworthy characters. While I am in no position as a blind person to critique the feelings of those who found this offensive, I do think that the scale of the response was exaggerated as much by the lack of alternative stories as by the flaws in the Robert Zemeckis film itself. Surely portraying witches as having three fingers is not at all the same thing as saying all people with three fingers are witches. What makes it feel that way is the distinct lack of alternative narratives to provide perspective and balance. This story becomes a monster because it is unchallenged, not because it is inherently monstrous.

Similarly, a common complaint among disabled media commentators is that our disabilities are reduced to a handful of tired old tropes: the villain (Darth Vader, Captain Hook), the victor (Tiny Tim), the superhero (Daredevil). But we mistakenly then assert that this is maleficent. It’s not the portrayal of stereotypes that is in itself harmful, it’s the fact that these are all we’ve got. Having a disability does not, after all, exempt you from villainy or heroism. The crime is in reducing the vast glitzy tower of lived experience to these few stories.

Beyond representation
I have three children, so I spend a lot of time watching CBeebies. Children’s media has a crucial role to play in shaping how young people begin to think about diversity and difference. CBeebies boasts several shows that are orientated around disability, including Magic Hands, Something Special, Melody and Pablo. These latter two are particularly interesting. Although they were created in collaboration with the RNIB, and features a visually impaired actor playing Melody, while Pablo not only addresses the lived experience of autistic children, it does so using an autistic voice cast and in direct consultation with autistic young people who help to generate the storylines. Both are strong examples of going beyond mere representation of disabilities – often by non-disabled actors, embracing, as they do, ideas and talent drawn from within the very communities they seek to represent.

This is a welcome step, but it is only one step. There need to be many more, and much faster. To repeat, this linear plot needs to be swept away altogether by a powerful torrent of new ideas and diverse ways of thinking. When, for example, will we move away from disability represented by a single disability character, and see more portrayals of disabled families and even entire communities? Often it still feels like a tick box exercise. The net effect is that disability appears isolated in our media, a discrete, stand-alone option, it’s disconnecting presence safely contained within strict limits, like a tiger at the zoo. And then there’s the question of silos. While Melody and Pablo are interesting devices, they are self-contained units within an otherwise standardised schedule. Again, to criticise this is not to say it is in itself wrong. There is a place for these kinds of discrete treatments of a single topic, but in order for them to be viewed as beacons rather than silos, they need to be part of a broader and more integrated picture. When will we see a blind Go Jetter, or a deaf Octonaut?

What we see on our screens and hear on our radios is only, of course, the final product, it is not the whole system. The barriers that restrict disabled people’s access to the media, and thus restrict the media’s ability to represent disability fully, begin in childhood.

My visually impaired son may tune in to Melody to see if it speaks to him, but the amount of content that is audio-described for his enjoyment as a visually impaired viewer is limited. There are all the apps and web-content that go along with broadcast media these days. It’s nice to watch Melody, but if the presenters in the CBeebies House are waxing lyrical about a great new app that he as a visually impaired child can’t access with a screenreader, then he faces the painful feeling of being put back out in the cold just as soon as he thought he’d been welcomed in to the warm.

And this is far from the only way in which the current media environment thwarts the ambitions of the next generation. To tell the truth, a variety of nuanced and diverse stories we need to tell are going to be hard to get disabled writers to write them, disabled actors to portray them, disabled directors to present them, and disabled editors to commission them.

Here too the cry is ‘More’. Disabled people have long advocated that there should be ‘nothing about us without us’, whether in public policy, health, education, or culture. It is a betrayal for the majority of storylines about disability to be penned by non-disabled writers and portrayed by non-disabled actors. As a society we are still far more tolerant of this than we would be of, say, a white actor using makeup to portray a Black character.

As well as more disabled characters on-screen, we need more disabled people behind the scenes. Only then will the amount of content that authentically addresses the question of disability with integrity and a rich, deeply nuanced understanding increase massively. Without an increase in the numbers of disabled people working at all levels of our media industries, we will fail to secure the profoundly distressing experience of seeing the story of our lives told, often haphazardly, by others.

Setting diversity free
Several broadcasters, including the BBC and Channel 4, have well-intended projects aimed at increased recruitment from the disabled population, but again, these only address the problem at its final stages. The roots go much deeper. Young people who face prejudice, discrimination or exclusion in their formative years are much less likely to grow up with aspirations of joining a world that they perceive as having shunned them. So they walk away, and with them goes their passion and their insight. If the media industry thinks it can afford to keep losing people before they’ve even started, I fear it’s very much mistaken.

Change may be discomfiting for those who have done very well out of the existing system, and the task is doubtless a difficult one, but the rewards are there for all, not just the disabled population. Increased diversity, real diversity not the tokenism and we see imposed within silos and bolt-on schemes, will enrich the entire industry and breathe new life in to what sometimes seems like a stagnating realm trapped within a hall of mirrors all of its own making.

Maybe the perpetuation of the status quo, our current media landscape for many long years, give or take the odd experiment at the fringes, is why our TV channels now seem to have little to show us other than a never-ending cycle of The Big Bang Theory and Murder, She Wrote.

Ultimately what we’re talking about here is a form of oppression, possibly unconscious, certainly very civilised. Limited representation, restricted access and an alienating culture, work in concert to create a world where those with disabilities can still struggle to feel welcome.

We complain that the media reduces our disabilities to a hopelessly simplistic set of stereotypes, which it surely does, and that these stories are therefore pernicious, which they surely aren’t. What’s pernicious is that these are the only stories that get told. It’s not about right or wrong, either/or – it’s about more.
Widening perspectives in political journalism

Leah Cowan examines the lack of diversity in British political journalism, why it matters, and the multiple challenges faced by ‘outsiders’ looking to get a foothold.
The stories to which we devote column inches shape the collective imagination. As feminist academic Donna Haraway writes: ‘It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with.’

The way we present information can never be unbiased; within the copy we file, we make decisions about protagonists and antagonists, beginnings and endings, and rights and wrongs. The media, often inevitably, dance to the beat of political agendas and public appetites. The topics which receive scrutiny and a platform feed into political agendas which spin votes and shape policy. If we recognise this, we should be cognisant of how our fingerprints leave impressions on the clay of our journalistic work. From this viewpoint, the fact that the UK media is 94% white and incredibly monocultural is of deep concern. The 94% of journalists who are white, then, set the standard for what is deemed worth reporting on, and in political journalism, for what counts as ‘political’.

In a bid to prove that the BBC’s output is impartial, its director general Tim Davie introduced new rules for staff which, it was understood, would effectively ban them from attending Black Lives Matter demonstrations and Pride marches in support of LGBT rights and justice. In response to backlash, this announcement was further clarified: as only applying to senior reporters, who are expected to ‘take care when making decisions about participating in events’ and ‘not to take a personal public position … on public policy issues’. Either way, this milquetoast clutch at ‘impartiality’ marks a huge betrayal of workers across the BBC at all levels who are themselves queer, trans and people of colour, and whose lives as people living at the intersection of oppressions based on race, sexuality and gender identity are neither ‘impartial’ nor remotely up for debate.

There is a tacit assumption in Davie’s edict that Black and trans journalists, for example, do not have personal stakes in their own lives, but can somehow split the self, holding their identity at arm’s length as ‘policy issues’ while the journalistic mind observes and comments. This framing tells journalists who are not white, straight, and cis that the burning issue of their very existence must be packed away and put on the shelf in order for them to do the work of objective reporting. The impact of this adherence to narrow-perspective journalism is keenly felt. The slow decline of traditional reporting and print media – national newspaper sales have fallen by nearly two-thirds over the last two decades – runs congruent to the narrow spectrum of perspectives which the industry welcomes. Less money for specialist, careful, time-consuming reporting means that stories that are already marginalised get pushed out of the main picture.

As Malcolm Dean wrote for the Guardian in 2011: ‘Papers have shrunk, specialist journalists have been slashed and profits have disappeared. As a result there will be fewer well-informed journalists to analyse and present the increasing amount of data. Fewer specialists also means fewer awkward questions asked in ministerial briefings. Less grit in the democratic oyster means fewer policy pearls.’5

Migrants – a confected crisis

A key example of this is the broad brushstroke and sensationalised media reporting around the ‘migrant crisis’ which peaked in 2015. High numbers of people fled conflicts that Britain had performed a key role in catalysing, which resulted in increased fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea and directly led to the hardening of Britain’s borders. Governments seemingly dodged accountability for the 2,500-5,000 people a year6 who were reported dead or missing after attempting to make the crossing, alongside a 100% spike in racist attacks7 on people of colour in the UK in the run-up to Brexit. Despite pockets of sensitive reporting, a media industry which is largely monocultural, as well as slashing reporters and budgets to strive for profit, struggled to bring humanity to the public conversation emerging around this issue.

Research conducted by journalist Liz Gerard revealed that between 2010 and 2016, the Daily Express made immigration its leading story 122 times in the same time period.8 The frequent repetition of these messages gave the wholly unformed impression that Britain was under threat. A fallout of this approach, it could be inferred, was the referendum on Britain’s membership to the EU in 2016 which in reality became a battle for the heart and soul of Britain, and a fight to the death to pull up the drawbridge and curb migration. In this context, based on frequency of Google searches9 and polls of the key issues10 informing voters’ decision-making, immigration became a lightning rod issue which swayed the referendum vote. It’s worth considering how these events might have played out differently with sensitive, nuanced reporting delivered by people with a lived experience or informed perspective on migration.

We can draw a connecting line between media reports, and the decision (albeit marginal) to push forward with Brexit, because the more the media talks about borders and migration, the faster whatever the message (and in tabloid newspapers, often the message is sensational and incredibly hostile to migrant communities), the public is left with a sense that the borders are vulnerable. In an article exploring the paradox of border security, social sciences professor Bastian Vollmer explains: ‘Borders are open but secure – a difficult message to bring across an audience that is struggling with an environment increasingly dictated by confusion and ambiguity’.11 This message is especially difficult to convey if the media industry doing the conveying is so far removed from the realities of its intricacies.

Structural factors

The dearth of accurate, humanising reporting on these complex issues can be in part attributed to the fact that the people who are best-placed to speak on them are for the most part unable to break into the media industry. At entry level in particular, the industry relies on unpaid and low-paid labour, and often requires workers to check their own lived experiences at the door. My own experiences of trying to enter the media industry are not uncommon among my peers: in my early 20s I was offered an internship at the Guardian as part of their positive action scheme, and upon discovering that the placement was unpaid, I turned it down. The email thread which followed (an exchange between two editors, who were older men) reads like satire. One wrote, of my rejection of the offer, ‘that’s young people for you’. The other replied: ‘I think it will [sic] be extremely shortsighted of Leah to turn down the chance to spend time at the Guardian … Does she know what the positive action scheme is? Has she seen our brochure? But it’s her call.’

I had seen the brochure, and it was indeed my call. The existence of an unpaid positive action scheme for people of colour pointed to a glaring misunderstanding – that the lack of ‘diversity’ in newsrooms was about Black people needing to be there in the first place was ticking boxes and filling quotas, just be in the room by any means necessary. My first encounter with the media industry left a bitter taste; I felt that a positive action scheme which seemingly lacked understanding of the barriers and structures that prevents us from being there in the first place was ticking boxes and filling quotas, not doing the work of radical reconfiguration. The reality is that in the UK, communities of colour lag behind white people when it comes to wealth accumulation.12 This means that we are simply less likely to have the funds available to us to do a week’s unpaid internship, with no concrete prospect of employment at the end.
The impartiality fallacy

The idea of a presenter being able to make only impartial observations on an incident is comparable to the anthropological practice of (mostly wealthy white men) making distanced observations on situations ‘in the field’. This framing within anthropology has been criticized in-depth by a host of researchers, including feminist anthropologist Tomomi Yamaguchi, whose 2007 study argued that the binary places of ‘home’ and ‘being’ in the field were increasingly fluid categories.12 It might be more useful to accept, with transparency, that the ability for a journalist to step back and interpret an unfolding news story with an impartial eye is a fallacy.

However, another danger faced by people of colour and other marginalised groups entering the media industry is the imperative that we only talk about race. As former Guardian editor Heather Barrett said in an interview in 2017, ‘Women of colour basically get commissioned to write about race, to write about their experiences of oppression and things like that, and it’s a very limited box’.13 In step with being forced to channel their identities into the white, monocultural, elite landscape of mainstream media, we can also be expected to mine our own lives for content; we are ‘experts by experience’ rather than asked enough to report on any topic. Award-winning essayist and writer Roxane Gay explains on the Another Round podcast that Black women are often expected to cannibalise our experiences, and to lay bare our trauma in exchange for being permitted to write or speak at all.14

The issues undergirding the glaring whiteness and same-ness of newsrooms are those which are faced across many industries. It is essential that routes into journalism are made accessible and desirable. Entry level jobs must be secure, contracted, and paid at a living wage, and union organising must be recognised and encouraged. More critical and more difficult to enact, is for some in well-paid positions to give up power. Top-to-bottom reconfiguration of mainstream media organisations can ensure the impartiality of newsrooms, and some have already made progress in hiring experts by experience and ‘experts on experience’. 15 It might be increasingly fluid to consider places of ‘home’ and ‘being’ in the field, but the affect gets a rebrand but the substance stays the same. It remains to be seen whether media organisations can be courageous enough to centre our voices through meaningful structural change.

Leah Cowan is a former politics editor for gal-dem, an online magazine run by women and non-binary people of colour. Her first book, Border Nation: A Story of Migration, will be published in spring 2021.

References


Reprezentology takeaways

Structural barriers stop people from diverse backgrounds working in political journalism

• News outlets need a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences across all roles to improve the accuracy, depth and reach of their journalism.
• We all need to question dominant media narratives and how impartiality is defined today.
• Only a radical overhaul of newsrooms can dismantle the structural barriers to people from under-represented groups getting paid work and career opportunities.
In the week of the US elections, there was a breakthrough in the search for the Covid vaccine, Brexit negotiations continued, and a former Daily Mirror Chicken may have missed out on promotion thanks to an intervention by the Prime Minister’s fiancée.
None of these certainties have turned out to be true. The pandemic ended up being completely unrepresentative of the decades that would follow. While the term ‘journalism’ has covered my role for much of my career, the job itself is subject to constant change. In my last post as an editorial trainer at Reach Plc, I delivered training across the country, which meant at the Daily Mirror as well as travelling the country to other newspapers. Additionally, I did shifts on almost every desk at Mirror Online. Digital journalism changes quickly, and it’s easy to feel rusty on all the various systems and workflows. I had to be on top of all of these jobs, ready to train everyone from a news shifter to a social media editor to a personal finance writer.

One morning in 2017, I was updated via full of people on how to use Facebook to ‘sell’ their stories effectively, for maximum audience engagement. One reporter tentatively put his hand up. He was very sorry to tell me that Facebook had changed its algorithm earlier that morning, and so…

everything on my side was wrong. In a digital age, media training is a conversation, not a broadcast. I had to be prepared to be wrong as well as right on any given element of digital storytelling.

The training room is also a confessional. Whether a trainer is in-house or a consultant brought in, we are seen as neutral, and our words are the safe spaces. Journalists can ask the questions that they feel silly asking of their workmates; let off the steam that they had to direct at their editors; and ask why digital is something that is happening slowly down from the ways of working on a newspaper.

Gone are the days
In the last few decades of the 20th century, the golden age of newspapers, newspapers only really got lively by 10am, with the first big editorial meeting at 11am. A second shift would come in late afternoon to work until the newspaper went off-store, to the printers, by about 10pm. It could be 11pm or later if there was huge breaking news. There might be days when a journalist did not produce a story for print at all, because they were working on something big, or were out on reporting. Tabloid section editors might have a couple of thousand pounds thrown at them at a weekend to generate provocation stories. One example, told to me on my podcast Freelance Pod, involved an editor asking one of her reporters to pretend to be a cool, cutting-edge Young British Artist (aka the YBAs), even hiring gallery space. That was the power of newspapers, and that was the luxury of time and money that they could afford to waste.

At about 7am on an otherwise normal weekday in May 2016, the Head of Video at Mirror Online called me to say that he could get down to a sinkhole in Charnton, near where I lived in Greenwich, south east London, to take some video. This particular sinkhole had made the front page of the Evening Standard the night before, as it had opened up underneath a car that had half-fallen into it. I arrived at a scene that was mostly taped-off for the safety of passers-by; journalists had beaten me there. A lot of them brought impressive broadcast kit from their newsrooms, I was going to use my phone. One journalist walked past me, saying that he was going to head into the graveyard of the church by the sinkhole, and get better shots from there. I did the same, stepping up onto a small brick wall to take pictures and video inside the hole. I could glimpse what was keeping the car half-out of the sinkhole. Then there’s a search-friendly headline too, all the while fielding GC messages from editors and the social media team, and keeping one hand hovering over the phone to set up an interview for the next article. If news breaks, there is a choice to make, however, perhaps a liveblog, and maybe even a video. That’s enough to get me to leave, struggling with the 3G that everyone else was using to send my pictures and video into the office.

It was thrilling to actually do some reporting, and to try to beat the other journalists by getting my exclusive multimedia in first. I’d accepted that this kind of thing wouldn’t really feature in this job when I took on the role. I had decided that it was still one of the best mornings of my three years at Reach Plc. Imagine how despondent digital journalists across the nation feel.

I meant to stay in that job for two years before going freelance, but I made it to three before redundancy came for me. After finding it hard to walk away from a salary, in April 2018 I found myself with a generous payout and a long-buried dream started to look more and more like something I ought to dig up.

We live in a world now where the means of publishing are available to anyone with a decent wifi connection. More and more people look to journalists to teach them how to use digital storytelling tools. This means that marginalised groups can circumvent the traditional gatekeepers to get themselves seen. Lack of diversity in newsrooms and writer’s rooms and other rooms that shape how we see ourselves and the world, is hugely problematic. It requires urgent solutions. Training helps us to understand our own biases and open up curiosity and creativity.

The freelance leap
I had no illusions that writing consumer journalism could bring in enough income to sustain my life in London. Print is generally more lucrative than digital, but print titles are fast disappearing. So my life as a freelance would have to involve balancing different kinds of jobs, and branching out from pure journalism.

So you can see how my freelance work has diversified, and how my freelance careers offer a lot of freedom, but also time constraints.

Reprezentology takeaway:
While providing greater flexibility, freelancing in the media offers few certainties and little financial security. To better support freelancers, the industry should ask itself:

- Can you help make the working conditions for freelancers more secure?
- Do you share access to information, courses, new technology and practice with freelance staff?
- Is there mentoring or other support available to help freelancers shape their ‘brand’?

I entered a new world where performance and personality mattered as much as the content, which isn’t always so true with writing. I didn’t necessarily build my personal brand. After speaking at a few conferences, one or two fans of the podcast would come up and chat to me as though they knew me, which showed me the power of audio, and convinced me that I should do more with it. I was asked a number of times if I’d tried stand-up, and a long-buried dream started to look more and more like something I ought to dig up.

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The training role really helped my transition into freelancing. As soon as I’d left my job, I had requests come my way, and they’ve never completely stopped. The early part of the pandemic this year was tough, as we all adjusted to Zoom, but since then, a lot of people have decided that learning media skills—especially podcasting—is a good use of their enforced indoor time.

Alongside training, making a successful podcast in my last role at the Daily Mirror, Black Mirror Cracked, played a large part in changing my career. The pod netted 20,000 downloads in its first week (with seven episodes), and 150,000 over the six months I worked on it before I was made redundant (I worked on the first 30 episodes). Those numbers led me to speaking about the podcast at several events over the summer and I’d left it behind at the Mirror. 

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The early, unofficial prototypes of the Financial Times' women subscribers' engagement projects were inauspicious. They started with women whispering in office kitchens about the urgent need for a more balanced output; with rudimentary spreadsheets comparing the number of women and men featured in bylines and skylines; and a legendary edition of the opinion page on which three of the four writers were white men called David (the fourth was a white man called Michael).

The hope – back when this was still controversial (hence the kitchen-whispering) – was that data, however elementary, would call attention to the disparity in a way that simply saying that there was a clear imbalance hadn’t. The hunch at the outset was that very ‘male’ coverage would be reflected in the make-up of the audience, and that a more balanced output would help broaden the subscriber base. Five years on, the FT has a company-wide goal of increasing women subscribers’ engagement championed by editor Roula Khalaf, a growing cluster of well-established newsroom projects and processes aimed at doing just that, which I lead; and a steady rise in engagement.

The first official women’s engagement experiment was launched in the newsroom in 2017: Project XX (named after the chromosome), where one story a day likely to be read by an above average percentage of our female subscribers was promoted high on the home page. Supportive senior editors, including Khalaf, then deputy editor, made it permanent after a trial showing clear engagement benefits. Our initiatives now range from dedicated promotion channels and targeted products that help ensure relevant content reaches the target audience, to editorial workflow systems and AI tools.

These initiatives, in all their disparate forms, broadly share the same simple goals. They’re about increasing the engagement of our women subscribers, currently about 25% of the total – primarily by encouraging changes to both content and newsroom culture that will help the FT feel more relevant to a section of the audience who are already signed up but significantly less engaged than men. In focus groups conducted a few years ago when data first confirmed the disparity, a majority of women explained that they found the tone off-putting. If the FT were a person, they said, it would be a man. So we set a goal of changing women subscribers’ perceptions – in the long run increasing their engagement and in turn building their loyalty. Internally, we want to learn more about what women subscribers consume and to encourage culture change to help us better meet their demands.

Collecting the data

The initiatives share a few common features. First, they’re all founded on data science specialists that, since 2016, have informed us about what women subscribers read. The audience engagement team uses this information to develop and implement initiatives, tailored to FT newsroom culture, that help our journalists meet these readers’ demands.

Our understanding of women subscribers’ distinctive reading patterns is made up of several complementary metrics. More significant than high traffic (although, as with groundbreaking investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct in business like the Presidents Club scandal, that is always welcome) is the percentage of women’s page views for an average FT story. This gives us a benchmark against which to measure the popularity of topics, sections and, importantly, stories for this smaller section of the audience.

Close monitoring of ‘over-indexing’ stories (in practice, that’s me staring at a dashboard of data every morning), more so than broader categories such as topics, has proved integral to how the projects work. It allows us to spot trends and share the information across the editorial and commercial parts of the business, informing departments from events to marketing. Crucially it also allows us to understand not just what has over-indexed but also to predict with confidence what will. It gives a fairly accurate feel for hard-to-quantify elements such as tone, too.

Within the FT, focusing on how individual stories fare means we can swiftly pick up on the distinctive ways women engage with new topics that dominate the headlines, such as coronavirus, the deaths of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter, and US president-elect Joe Biden and vice-president-elect Kamala Harris. This has practical value for example, it helps us ensure headlines on these topics include keywords that reflect the aspects women are reading about.

Over the longer term, it helps us correct long standing misconceptions (‘women don’t read about “core FT” subjects’; ‘men don’t read about “soft” subjects’). We can spot unexpected patterns (the obscure corners of financial regulation that consistently over-index) and pinpoint never ones (environmental, social and governance investing; the gig economy). It highlights the demand for stories long dismissed as ‘niche’ (workplace discrimination and diversity, managing childcare, femtech, the menopause) – and that the idea of...
Easier to ignore a Slack channel quietly pumping out data awareness of imbalances and encourage culture change. It’s appears more effective as a way to raise journalists’ closer to the kitchen-whisperers’ basic spreadsheet. This project has led a shift back to a more manual approach, encountered limitations, including in-built bias. The 50:50 macro-level picture of imbalances in output but we’ve also imbalances by hand when, like a lot of newsroom processes It may also seem counterintuitive to ask colleagues to count sell. Yet many in editorial and beyond have already signed up filling in spreadsheets for little direct benefit is not the easiest The long-term aim is for each desk to reach a roughly equal men writers, experts and other contributors in their output. So, for example, many FT teams have volunteered to join the BBC-led 50:50 project, tracking the balance of women and men writers, experts and other contributors in their output. The long-term aim is for each desk to reach a roughly equal monthly ratio. Asking busy journalists to spend extra time filling in spreadsheets for little direct benefit is not the easiest sell. Yet many in editorial and beyond have already signed up – very often because they believe in the principle but also because it can help them reach more readers. It may also seem counterintuitive to ask colleagues to count imbalances by hand when, like a lot of newsroom processes – including several of our FT experiments – this could be automated. Automation has proved useful in providing a macro-level picture of imbalances in output but we’ve also encountered limitations, including in-built bias. The 50:50 project has led a shift back to a more manual approach, closer to the kitchen-whisperers’ basic spreadsheet. This appears more effective as a way to raise journalists’ awareness of imbalances and encourage culture change. It’s easier to ignore a Slack channel quietly pumping out data than a spreadsheet you fill in by hand after poring over quotes, pictures and bylines in your own stories.

What next? As we learn more about our target audiences, focus on new ones, and this year in particular respond to big news events, the strategy continues to evolve. We are investigating the longer-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic on women’s reading habits. We’ve focused specifically on American women during the election as part of a US growth strategy. And since the killing of George Floyd, plans to move beyond gender as we broaden our audience have gained momentum. I’m looking at what we can transfer from the women’s projects to help build a more ethnically diverse audience – expanding the 50:50 Project, for example, and promoting through specific platforms, like Instagram – while acknowledging that it will inevitably require a significantly different approach.

And what about those who don’t wish to participate in such projects for whatever reason? Experience says time and energy is more efficiently spent working with those who do. Others will often join eventually – when critical mass is reached and/or when the benefits of participating clearly outweigh those of not doing so – and they’re always welcome. At the FT, as it turns out, there are enough people willing to take part to make it work.

References
2. Hazard Owen, Laura (2018) “If the Financial Times were a person, it would be a man-heres-how-the-paper-is-trying-to-change-that/, accessed 30 November 2020.
In March 1979, BBC Two broadcast ‘It Ain’t Half Racist, Mum’. Produced for the BBC’s Open Door series, which gave marginalised groups access to the airwaves, it is notable for directly challenging the corporation itself, taking aim at the racism and stereotyping present in its comedy and current affairs programming.

Introduction by K Biswas

The half-hour show – made in association with the Campaign Against Racism in the Media – was fronted by cultural theorist Professor Stuart Hall and actor Maggie Steed. Shot like an everyday BBC newscast, the two anchors are sat at a desk speaking directly to camera, their words intercut with footage from popular 1970s television – highlighting the racial slurs concerning Britain’s minority communities present in family sitcoms, and primetime current affairs programmes giving platforms to nativist voices like Enoch Powell as experts in discussions around migration.

The BBC would subsequently apologise for the broadcast, believing the show to have been “injurious” to the “professional integrity” of such corporation heavyweights as Robin Day and Ludovic Kennedy featured in the programme. We include an edited transcript of the television essay here not as a historical artefact but to ask whether contemporary discourse about race in the media has sufficiently moved forward in the intervening four decades.
Maggie Steed: Hello. You may not have realised it, but you’ve just been warned about this programme. When the BBC says a programme like this is outside their control, what they are telling you is that they don’t think it’s balanced, neutral, or fair. We hope to show you that many of the programmes which are under the editorial control of the BBC, and ITV, are themselves biased and imbalanced – especially in the coverage they give to Britain’s Black community.

Not only is a lot of this coverage not neutral, it actually reinforces racism.

In the beginning, there was Lord Reith, the first director general of the BBC.

Clip from Edinburgh Television Festival Q&A Humphrey Barclay (Head of comedy, London Weekend Television):

I don’t think that series [Mind Your Language] is socially damaging, I hope it isn’t. Otherwise, we really oughtn’t to be doing it. But I think that what people get out of that is a lot of enjoyment. I don’t think it’s at the expense of the characters. I think there is a multi-racial community working in that classroom, at some level, which is enjoyable. Which may make people who are not members of any of those racial minorities friendlier towards the races they see portrayed there, without saying – when they meet an Indian in the street – ‘Oh, he always talks like that and he already because he wears a turban.

Clip from Tonight Philip Tibenham: Predictably, the Asian population has drifted into its own ghetto, sprawling on either side of a long road called Whalley Range. The standing local joke is for bus drivers to announce it as the Khyber Pass. But part of the problem in Blackburn is that some immigrants are on the move. This used to be a solid immigrant area, but it’s been demolished under a slum clearance programme. That’s meant that some Asians have split over into adjacent white, working-class areas, and there are those who don’t like it one bit.

Stuart Hall: This Tonight report and Mind Your Language both start from the same assumption: the problem isn’t the hostility which Asians face when they move out of the ghetto, but the fact that they are ‘spilling out’ into adjacent white working-class neighbourhoods. Blackburn’s problem is that immigrants are on the move.

Clip from Tonight Philip Tibenham: In political terms, it led to something quite startling for the BBC. When did building up a successful racist party become, in the climate of the time, a multi-racial community? Blackburn is a multi-racial community.

Philip Tibenham: For a man who didn’t form his party until earlier this year, John Kingsley Read, chairman of the ultra-right-wing National Party, came top of the poll.

Clip from Tonight Maggie Steed: Here, the freedom of the air is the freedom to allow unsubstantiated racist slander to pour out from the screen, over the audience. Now Mr Read has the reporter’s ear. It’s an intimate little scene. The attention he’s getting from the reporter lends weight to what he is saying, and it’s a reminder that we should never be in any doubt where Blackburn and Mr Read stand.

Clip from Tonight Philip Tibenham: It’s probably also fairly obvious to most people who actually know Blackburn that some Asians have spilt over into adjacent white working-class areas, and there are those who don’t like it one bit.

Maggie Steed: The comedy makes it okay, natural, acceptable. If you think this is an exaggeration, look at the way exactly the same attitudes dominate the outlook of serious television documentary makers when they deal with what they like to call ‘racial problems’. For instance, when Philip Tibenham and the Tonight team went down to darkest Blackburn, they made a joke about Blacks and overcrowding the starting point of their investigation.

Clip from Tonight Maggie Steed: When did building up a successful racist party become, in the BBC’s language of neutrality, ‘a remarkable achievement’? Can you imagine a report describing the rise of the Black Panthers as a remarkable achievement? Still, the cameras don’t leave us in much doubt where Blackburn and Mr Read are concerned. Here he is again, shown as a respectable politician hard at work in his front room, and he has a story to tell our reporter.

Clip from Tonight Maggie Steed: Yes, thanks to such stories, this is the famous BBC balance and impartiality in action. Current affairs programmes aren’t supposed to express a viewpoint. They have to be impartial. And when the allegations in that Blackburn programme got too outrageous, the reporter did tell us there wasn’t a shred of evidence to support them. But formal balance is one thing, and the impression that strong images make is another. This isn’t an accusation against a particular reporter. It’s a question of how the media, as a whole, work; and of how television works on the audience. In those last extracts we had vicious allegations against Blacks made it a confidential and authoritative way, and denials tentatively made later by a reporter stumbling up a backstreet in Blackburn.

Which do you think made the stronger, more memorable, impact? Even Philip Tibenham had to admit:

Clip from Tonight Maggie Steed: The fact is that the Kingsley Read version has already gone into the mythology of Blackburn. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people actually believe that it’s true.
Race – The Way We Live Now

Birmingham to Brent, wherever the television eye turns, it sees racism. But, from Blackburn to Blackburn to Brent, it’s a white problem. The problems are always set. This is the archetypal picture. Black communities are counting them in the majority. It isn’t only what the media say, it’s what they don’t say but take for granted.

Stuart Hall:
It is indeed, but what’s really terrifying is the way the scene is muddling, we’ve devised a steady diet of documentaries and programmes about the so-called immigration problem. Of course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. There is nothing that factual numbers are growing, course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. There is nothing that factual numbers are growing, course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. There is nothing that factual numbers are growing, course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. There is nothing that factual numbers are growing, course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. There is nothing that factual numbers are growing, course, as soon as you say immigration, it doesn’t matter how you wrap it up. 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Racism has never been put in a critical context by the media in this country. When it comes to fighting racism, the media are part of the problem. They perpetuate myths and stereotypes about Black people.

Stuart Hall: When last did you hear a television interviewer say: ‘Mr Fidel Castro, I understand you have a message for the British people? This isn’t giving the racists enough rope to hang themselves with. It’s allowing them to get away with murder, and all the time in the name of balance and good journalism. In the name of balance, the stronger racism becomes, the more airtime it gets.

Maggie Steed: And, in the name of balance – whatever that term may mean – you’d expect them to give equal treatment to the antiracists. So, take a look at these extracts from one of the few reports about the Anti-Nazi League, Britain’s biggest anti-racist umbrella organisation.

Clip from Tonight – Anti-Nazi League Report

Sally Hardcastle: But how effective has the league really been? At a time when electoral support for the National Front has declined, violent racial hatred is increasing. There are daily assaults on Asians in London’s East End and, just a few days ago in Bradford, a shotgun attack on an Asian restaurant. The badges and carvivals of the league have made no impact on the growing problem of hidden prejudice which prefers another kind of badge.

Stuart Hall: This film’s story works to make the Anti-Nazi League ineffective. And, even with racism on the increase, there is little coverage of any other anti-racist organisations – the ones run by Blacks for themselves, for example.

Maggie Steed: We’d like to show you one more piece of humbug from the BBC’s film about the Anti-Nazi League.

Clip from Tonight – Anti-Nazi League Report

Sally Hardcastle: The executive of the National Union of Journalists has come out strongly against the ‘Pull the Plugs’ campaign, calling it censorship.

Stuart Hall: Well, let’s talk about censorship. The BBC have effectively tried to censor the programme we’re making today. The corporation’s news department has denied us access to any of their material. Independent Television News and many commercial companies have been similarly obstructive. Why this interference? Here’s what the BBC’s head of news, Alan Protheroe, said about the issue at a committee meeting of news and current affairs editors.

Voice-over: ‘Why should an organisation, the Campaign Against Racism in the Media, which might well accuse myself and my staff of racism, be given privileged treatment?’

Stuart Hall: Why indeed? But is it a privilege to try and deal, in half an hour, with literally thousands of hours of television broadcast each year? And who is really privileged when the news is above criticism? Here’s the justification of the ban given us by the BBC’s chairman, Sir Michael Swann:

Voice-over: ‘We are not prepared to release news film to fulfil an avowedly partial purpose unless we are totally reassured about the context and form in which it is to be used.’

Stuart Hall: Our concern in this programme is that the unwavering, but dangerously, partial attitudes of the BBC should not be placed above suspicion. Racism has never been put in a critical context by the media in this country. When it comes to fighting racism, the media are part of the problem. They perpetuate myths and stereotypes about Black people. They lie by omission, distortion and selection. They give racists inflated importance and respectability. In this half-hour programme we haven’t even touched on foreign coverage, the whiter-than-white coverage of the police, the employment of Blacks in television, Black culture, or news bias in press and TV. We believe these issues should be raised in mainstream television programmes, but will they be?
Kimberly McIntosh finds a lot to recommend in this practical guide to protest and campaigning written by a seasoned Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion and Occupy activist.
This is the field in which the book, How To Change It: Make a Difference by Joshua Virasami finds itself landing, as one of a series of 12 pocket-sized, practical guides published by the Guinness World Records’ Merry Books imprint. Virasami encourages readers to campaign strategically. Across three sections, he calls us to ‘educate, organise, agitate’: to educate ourselves on the structural causes of injustice, to map our allies, targets and opposition, and then to deploy the tactics needed to win. Each section comes with a curated playlist to complement the content and contextualise the arguments they make.

Virasami was, and is, part of a number of left-wing groups including Occupy London, Black Lives Matter UK, and the London Renters’ Union. As a result, this book is unashamedly left-wing and wears its politics openly. That’s not to say it doesn’t have range. Virasami uses a diverse set of topics, tactics and places, including the campaign to end the Sun’s Page Three, Gina Miller’s Brexit legal challenge, and the 2011 revolution in Rojava, Northern Syria, to illustrate his points. The research is thorough, with footnotes and call-out boxes used generously to explain theories, ideologies and lesser-known figures. But the movements and thinkers that anchor his arguments – like Frantz Fanon, Paolo Freire, Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci – were Marxist theorists. This could be seen as political bias. In actuality, it is an indication and indication of how little space competing ideologies have given to the global fight for intersectional justice. ‘There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas new ways of power in our own living.’ American writer and poet Audre Lorde told an audience at Harvard University in 1982. In How To Change it, the importance of learning from the past is central to its thesis. The book is at its strongest when it links historical movements and the tactics they employed to current ones. ‘It is mass organising that won many nations’ independence from European imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century, just as it is organising that won universal suffrage and the eight-hour working day,’ Virasami writes. Lessons from the US Civil Rights movement and the Awami Workers Party in Pakistan become the underpinnings of the London Renters’ Union’s strategy.

‘When we rage, it’s because something we love is being lost. Potential is being lost. Opportunity for joy, for happiness, is being lost. [But] we always need to remember what we love, and to celebrate that, as well as the rage.’

Change on the scale of say, US civil rights can feel exceptional and thus unattainable. How To Change it looks beyond the famous speeches and mass demonstrations, takes a bird’s eye view and invites readers to ask: How did that all come together? Ordinary people made it happen. And a strategic confluence of approaches got it done – leaders organised in their communities to mobilise people en masse whilst advocates pressured the people with power. In the chapter ‘Get Organising’, Virasami uses practical exercises to push two key messages: that successful movements are intentional and well-planned, but we’re all capable of creating that strategy for change if we have the right tools.

Learning from failure

Without strategy, tactics fall flat. But mistakes are where learning happens and How To Change it is willing to use examples of where movements didn’t get it right. Virasami uses the follies of groups he was part of, such as Occupy London and the London Black Revolutionaries, as examples of how promising collectives can fizzle out when direct action attention, and ‘[w]e were suddenly an unavoidable topic of conversation on radio shows and TV programmes around the country.’ Virasami writes. It was sustained at the time by environmental activists and followers of BLM UK on social media, but not by racial justice campaigners. Stafford Scott nor the Black holidaymakers interviewed by the Guardian whose trips were disrupted. It got the issues discussed, but did it advance the aims of the movement? That depends on your aims and intended audience. This tension that exists between passive allies isn’t explored.

Nevertheless, representing your supporters and starting a high profile conversation in their name matters. Because having an equity you face affirmed, having the language to describe it and the theory to explain it, is a key access point for organising. Throughout the book, Virasami successfully uses examples from his personal life to illustrate how politics happens to people. He’s been paid £3.77 an hour by a company where the CEO made £585,000 a year. He’s been racially profiled in school and in shops, stared at in the British countryside, and stopped and searched by the police. These all have historic, structural causes and knowing this can be empowering. How to Change it sees consciousness raising via political education as vital for movement building and societal transformation.

‘A political education … enables the majority of us to read the world, to understand, and to call bullshit.’ Virasami writes in chapter 8, ‘Get Teaching’. He argues this education does not have to be formal. Film, television and music can all articulate the realities of injustice and its causes. Steel’s Queen’s BBC miniseries Small Axe, love letters to Black resilience and triumph and power of collective struggle, could serve as such an example.

Inequity and injustice has increased in a year. Covid-19 has made the inequality of our lives clear: we are only as strong as the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable neighbours. Concern for poverty and inequality in Britain has, according to Ipsos MORI, never been higher. In June, Black Lives Matter protests resurfaced across the United States and Europe, invoking the efficacy of mass movements clear. And the slapdash response of many universities to the pandemic has energised students, who are using direct action and even rent strikes to protest their living and working conditions. The time for new visions is now. How to Change it is a useful guide for those new to activism who is interested in channeling their anger and discontent into something meaningful.

‘Rage needs to be twinned with love,’ Virasami told broadcaster Dotty Charles while discussing the book. ‘When we rage, it’s because something we love is being lost. Potential is being lost. Opportunity for joy, for happiness, is being lost. [But] we always need to remember what we love, and to celebrate that, as well as the rage.’

In a year that has been bleak for many, let’s use rage to fight for a world filled with love, happiness, and peace.

Kimberly McIntosh is a journalist and policy researcher on poverty and race.

How To Change It by Joshua Virasami is out now on Merky Books.

References


2020 is the year that politics engulfed us – all of us – and not only those whose lives have always had a political edge. For people whose economic precarity has hemmed them in, whose colour has marked them out, who have been disabled by their environment rather than their impairments – the sharp end of laws, politics and public attitudes have long-caused pain and injury. But this year, a pandemic came and was experienced by everyone, although it hasn’t affected everyone equally.
I’m going to wear a face mask, so
I’ll make it ice cream patterned.
I’ll make it as bold as can be,
one that screams ‘lick’ & ‘fun’.

I’ll make it bright & sparkling, like all
times we marked out celebrations:
my brother’s graduation,
the news of an engagement,
a casual stroll with my missus
through Soho on a Tuesday evening,
before our world turned like an upside-down
ice cream cone & love alone could not protect us.

I’ll make it hot like all the summer
afternoons spent by the river
at our favourite swimming hole,
before piling into the back of the truck
to stop by Dotty’s for a sweet treat after,
the whole family taking up the picnic table.

I’ll make it blue & yellow
& orange & pink –
all the flavours of bubble gum
ice cream, the kind I ordered as a kid
at Lorde’s Ice Cream Parlour
before I ate my mom’s instead.

By Dr Erica Gillingham

Dr Erica Gillingham is a queer poet, writer, and
bookseller with a PhD in Young Adult Literature.
To round off our inaugural issue, journalist, broadcaster and senior lecturer Marverine Duffy picks five things to read, watch or listen to when you are feeling inspired to learn more.

Read

The Good Immigrant, edited by Nikesh Shukla. Although four years old this collection of essays is still relevant (Unbound, 2016).

Loud Black Girls: 20 Black Women Writers Ask: What’s Next? Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviebinené, authors of the acclaimed Stay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible, invite the next generation of Black women in Britain – authors, journalists, actors, activists and artists – to explore what it means to them to exist in these turbulent times. With a foreword by Bernardine Evaristo, the 20 essays offer funny, touching and ultimately insightful perspectives on the question of ‘What’s Next?’ (Fourth Estate, 2020)

The Digital Lives of Black Women in Britain is a new book by Francesca Sobande from Cardiff University. Based on interviews and archival research, it explores accounts of 20th-century activism and television representations, to experiences of YouTube and Twitter. Sobande’s analysis traverses tensions between digital culture’s communal, counter-cultural and commercial qualities. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

‘Representations of British Chinese identities and British television drama: mapping the field’ is a 2019 article by Simone Knox from the University of Reading. Informed by an understanding of the complexity of the term ‘British Chinese’, it draws on a database that deploys a range of research, including archive research at the BFI Reuben Library, to map the presence of British Chinese actors in British television drama since 1945. (Journal of British Cinema and Television Vol. 16, Issue 2, 2019. Available online at euppublishing.com).

Afropean – Notes from Black Europe by Johny Pitts. The television presenter, writer and photographer travels through Europe, exploring the experiences of the African diaspora. Winner of the 2020 Jhalak Prize. (Penguin, 2020)

Watch

Steve McQueen’s highly anticipated Small Axe collection of five films hit our screens in Autumn 2020. Set in the late 60s through to the mid-80s amongst the West Indian communities of London, the films are a celebration of Black joy, beauty, love, friendship, family, music and food. Watch on BBC iPlayer.

Mission: Accessible

Comedian Rosie Jones is on a mission to help disabled people plan fun-filled adventures. With her comedian pals in tow, Jones visits places across the UK to compile a guide to the accessible British vacation. Watch on All 4 or YouTube.

CripTales: Launching the series celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act, director and disabled actor Mat Fraser said: ‘Disabled voices have been shut out of mainstream TV drama for too long and this is a chance to showcase some of the wonderful, inventive, funny, dramatic, sexy and sobering potential available.’ Watch on BBC Player. Why just read about Charlene White’s attempt to tackle racism in children’s programming (see page 10) without watching the very show itself: IRL with Team Charlene on ITV Hub.


Listen

Unchained. Brenda Birungi, also known as Lady Unchained, is a poet and presenter for the Prison Radio Association. She was nominated in the Best New Voice category in the 2020 Audio Production Awards. The PRA made this documentary for Radio 4 which unlocks untold stories of women in prison, contains research from Women In Prison and is punctuated by Brenda’s powerful poetry. Listen on BBC Sounds

BBC Asian Network is bringing back the hilarious podcast. But Where Are You Really From…?

There’s the whole of series 1 to enjoy as well. Hosts Eshaan Akbar, Nim Odedra and Sunil Patel discover just how ‘Desi’ their guest are, through funny and revealing stories. Listen on BBC Sounds

Chinese Chippy Girl is a podcast about growing up British born Chinese. Dive into some superb episodes discussing growing up. Listen on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

Dope Black Dads and Dope Black Mums podcast. Maryn Harrison has created a beautiful thing. What he and his network do in terms of bypassing gatekeepers and creating their own content is indicative of how Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are carving out spaces for their own authentic representation. Listen to Dope Black Dads and Dope Black Mums on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

Matilda Ibini, who describes herself as a bionic playwright, wrote one of the CripTales for the BBC, and in episode 9 of the Disability Arts Online and Graeae podcast she is interviewed about her work and storytelling. Listen on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

Marverine Duffy is on the editorial board of Reprezentology.
Birmingham City University

Professor Philip Plowden

Vice-Chancellor

Birmingham City University

analyzing diversity and representation across all forms of media. In March this year, BCU in collaboration with our Chancellor launched the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity. The Centre believes that accurate representation of all sections of society in all layers of the UK media is vital for the health of the industry. This is crucial in ensuring a functioning democracy and enabling critical human rights issues, such as freedom of expression, to be truly implemented. The Centre aims to critically analyse policies in the media industry with a view to increasing diversity and inclusion, improving policy decisions and spreading best practice. Inspired by the ethos of the Centre, Reprezentology was born, giving a platform for discussions, research and insights into representation and equality across the sector. The collaborative nature of the project encapsulates the more holistic approach to tackling the problem of diversity in the media. Information, answers and fresh thinking don’t belong solely to academia or the media industry. So the journal has articles and research from both. In the launch edition, for example, there’s an original piece of research conducted by a professional sound editor, mentored by an academic at our university. BCU and Cardiff are passionately committed to making Reprezentology available to a wide readership, so the emphasis is jointly on accuracy and accessibility. Written in plain language, and free to download, we want to open up this conversation to those who are best placed to inform real change. Universities are a vehicle to enable transformation, and as such, it is our duty and passion to actively promote social progress through learning, research, innovation and collaboration.

As Lenny often says about his own career: “You can’t be what you can’t see.” It’s a hugely valuable principle in holding our own performance up to the light – both in terms of our own organisation, but also the way in which we deploy our expertise. We were founded in 1843 as a School of Design and that creative arts’ heritage remains central to our university. And with over 50% of our students drawn from Black and Asian backgrounds across our city and our region, addressing racial imbalance in the arts has to be a key priority for us. This fresh and exciting journal was founded following discussions between BCU and Cardiff around the launch of a new research centre dedicated to

As is the case in many areas of society, the mainstream media often inadequately represent the diversity of the society they purport to reflect. Power structures, financial models and appointments to influential management and editorial positions all can and do militate against a representative media industry. Reprezentology aims to do something about that. Its guiding principles are an excellent model for all writers to follow, not just contributors to the new journal. In an era of profound public mistrust of public information — some of the mistrust was founded and some of it not — using simple, accessible language to reach as wide an audience as possible and attracting writers of proven expertise who use facts and evidence to start a debate or bring a fresh perspective is more important than ever. The central guiding principle of embracing diversity in all its forms and in everything the journal does is of the utmost consequence. In universities, diversity brings creativity, new knowledge, new perspectives and ultimately new discoveries and fresh thinking. Diversity is nothing less than the driving force of knowledge creation, and new knowledge counts for little if it is not disseminated. Reprezentology, then, captures the essence of what is required to take society forward and make the world a better place. It’s an honour to be able to partner with Birmingham City University in supporting and launching a new journal that tackles such an important topic. Bringing together a group of academics with a shared passion for diversity in the media, Reprezentology marks a welcome new departure which, it is hoped, will find wider resonance throughout our academic disciplines.

This is a groundbreaking project that will celebrate and enrich the cultural industry as a whole, and will give a broader-based platform to a wider range of voices and views than we have seen up to now. In this way Reprezentology addresses a problem that affects not only the media, but all of us, at a time when change is urgently needed.

Professor Colin Riordan

Vice-Chancellor

Cardiff University

Research centre dedicated to around the launch of a new following discussions with our friends at Cardiff University in launching Reprezentology. 2020 has taught us a lot, not least that achieving and celebrating racial equality is long overdue.

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Article ideas should be submitted to: Reprezentology@bcu.ac.uk

Please include a two-line biography, including relevant links to past published work. Academic pieces will be reviewed by relevant experts and assessed by the editorial board.

Reprezentology seeks to publish pieces from both academics and media practitioners, exploring complex issues in an accessible way. Before submitting anything for consideration, be sure you are familiar with our mission statement and guiding principles.

Commissioned journalism pieces should be between 500 and 2500 words
Commissioned academic pieces should be between 4000 and 8000 words

If we are interested in your pitch, we will contact you. Our editorial team is small, and it may take up to a month to receive a reply. Unfortunately, we are unable to reply to every submission. If you do not hear from us within a month, please assume that we have decided not to pursue your proposal this time. That does not mean we don’t want to hear from you again in the future.

Articles are read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to Reprezentology. Published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

Five Guiding Principles For Contributions

1. Clear language
Making content as widely accessible as possible, writing should be clear, concise and engaging.

2. Expertise
Contributors are expected to write on subjects for which they have proven expertise.

3. Supported by facts
Articles should be supported by verifiable facts and research-based evidence.

4. Refresh debate
Submissions should seek to enrich current debates or create new ones.

5. Diversity of perspectives
Preference will be given to writers seeking to widen representation and outline new perspectives.